17 NEW REVIEWS! STRIKE COMMANDER ● ROME: PATHWAY TO POWER ● PUTT PUTT JOINS THE PARADE
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EDITORS' CHOICE
LEMMINGS 2: THE TRIBES PG. 80

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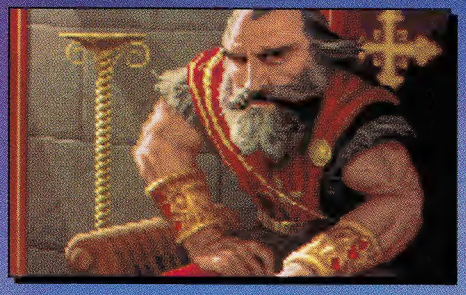

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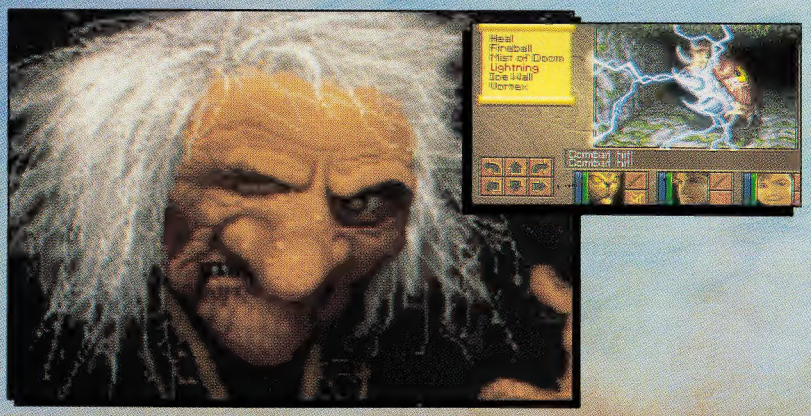

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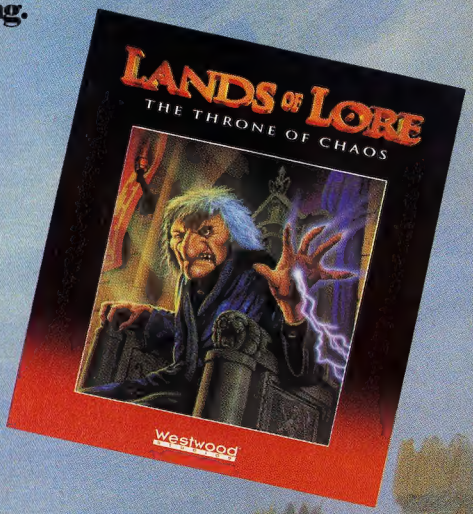

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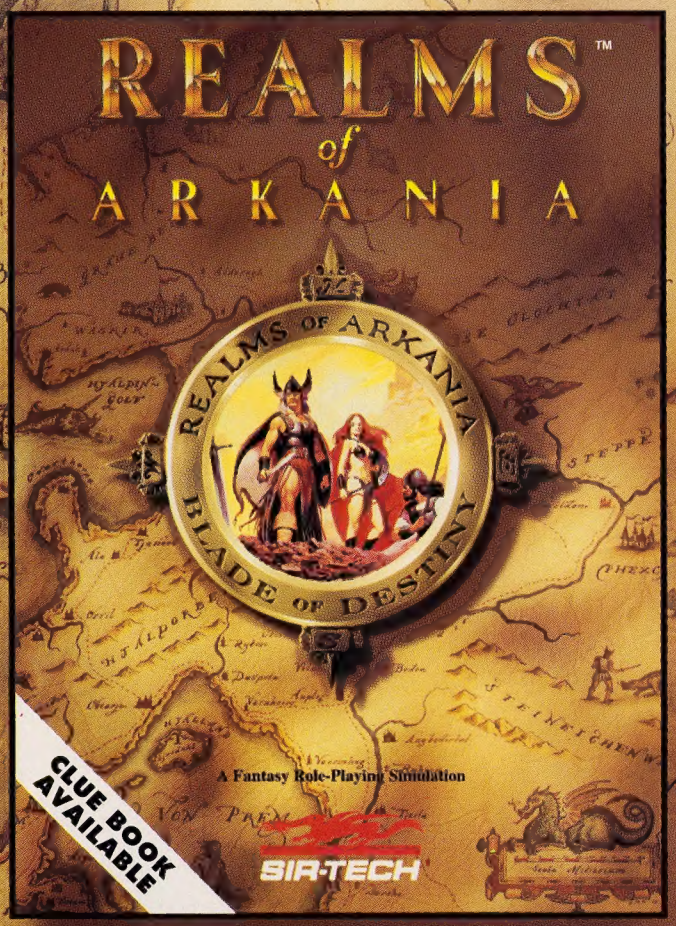

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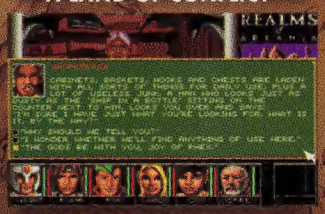
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PC GAMES
AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 1993
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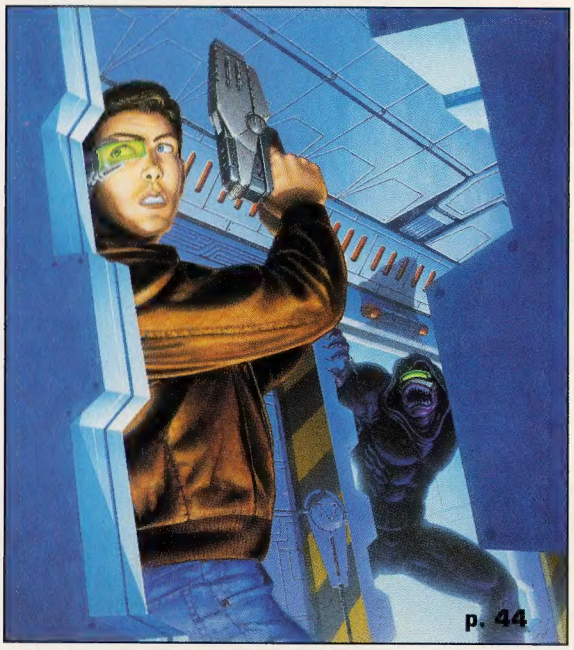
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EDITOR'S PAGE

I'M STUFFED AND I CAN'T GET UP!

You think you have it tough. I've got more than a gigabyte — that's over a thousand megabytes — of disk space on-line in my home office, and I'm almost out of digital closet space. My PCs are packed to the gills with program files, sound files, video files, image files, files of who-knows-what. I continually toss stuff into the electronic equivalent of the dumpster to make room for the new programs that just *have* to hit the hard drive.

Okay, so I have a few more games than you do on the shelves (and on the floor, and in the corner, and stacked up underneath the room-wide desktop), but we're all suffering from the same disease: Overload.

Overload as in big, monster games that put a stack of floppies in front of the PC during installation. Origin seems to want the prize for glut, what with its recent immense Ultimas, and now with its insanely huge Strike Commander.

As games try to compete for bragging rights, they're adding video clips (see "Sports Page" this issue), digitized music (ditto for "Pump Up the Volume!"), and enough speech to silence even President Clinton.

So what are we to do?

One technique that's gaining ground is disk compression, which crams the loose bytes of a file into a tighter packet. Compression's nothing new; it's been used for years by devotees of on-line services to slash download time. But today's compression is much improved. The compression and decompression cycles (during which the PC must pack and unpack files on the fly) are shorter now than ever, thanks to their amazing algorithms. For instance, Stacker 3.0, the premier compression program for the PC, works fast enough that you'll be hard pressed to notice a difference between running compressed and uncompressed files.

But, as in almost everything else concerning the PC these days, it's Microsoft that has turned compression into an acceptable habit. Its new DOS 6.0 comes equipped with DoubleSpace, a compression utility and technique that can effectively mutate 100-megabyte hard-disk drive into a 160-megabtye storage shed.

You don't get something for nothing, of course. And there's the rub. Some users have reported problems with DoubleSpace, including lost data and an inability to run games from a packed file. Origin, for example, just figured out how to talk its Strike Commander owners through an installation of the game to a DoubleSpace volume. It's not for the technically faint of heart.

Me? I don't use the stuff. Compression scares me. It's tough enough keeping the PCs up and running without adding another layer of potential problems. I'd rather play it safe and pay for another hard-disk drive.

But just because I can't bring myself to take on compression doesn't mean you shouldn't. In fact, to help out, *PCGames* will be examining disk compression and its effect on games and game-playing in the near future. We'll help you sort it out, and tell you whether you should follow my example or call me a coward.

— Gregg Keizer, Consulting Editor

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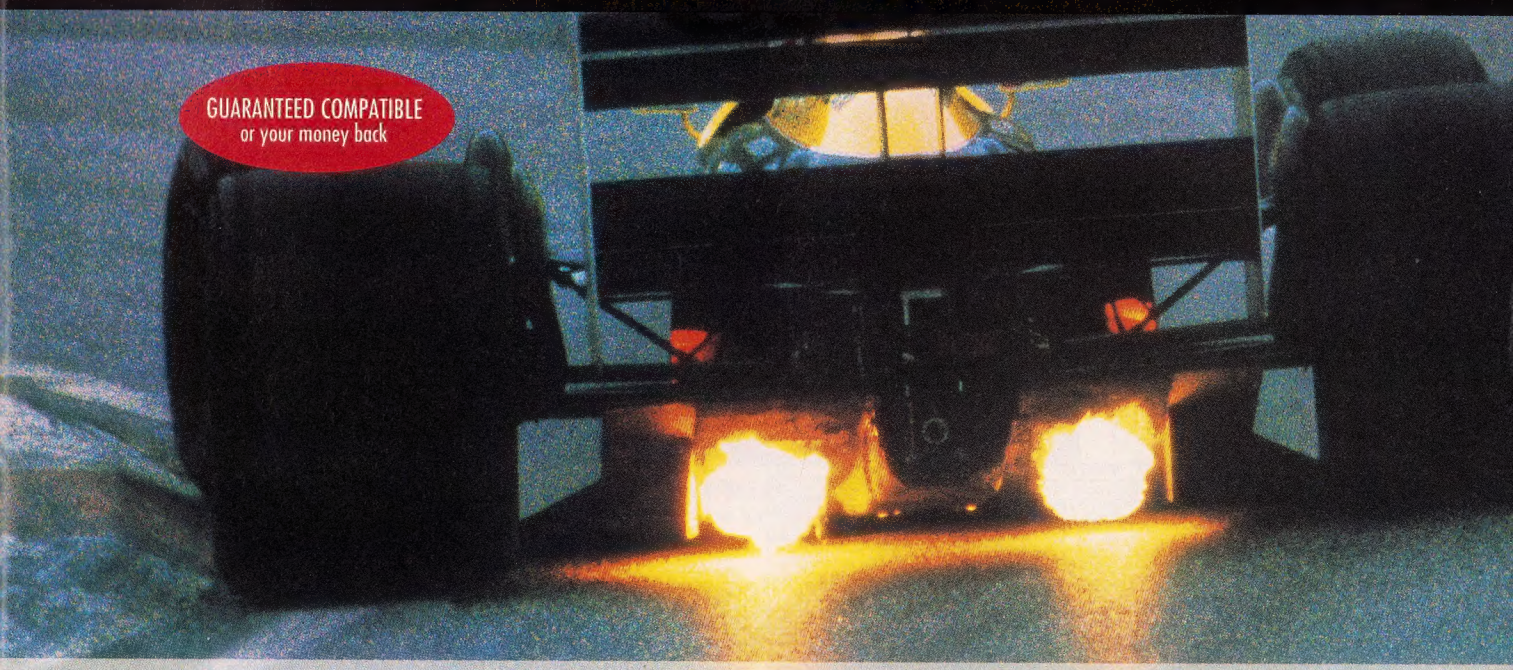

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A BUSTLING SIMCITY

Ink Development (San Mateo, CA) will market and distribute Maxis' **SimCity** for use on PenPoint mobile computers. Now you can Sim on the road (and see real-life examples of poor transportation planning while you play).

A class from Tilden Middle School in Rockville, Maryland, won the national "Future City" contest. Students designed a metropolis with SimCity and wrote essays on alternate energy sources for the future. The winners visited President Clinton and presented his daughter, Chelsea, with her own copy of SimCity. With their SimCity experience, the kids should have given the President some insights on balancing a budget and how raising taxes affects a politician's popularity.

SimCity will undergo urban renewal as Maxis develops **SimCity 2000: The Ultimate City Simulator** ($69.95). Some of the enhancements include 3-D graphics, freeways and schools, and subways and sewers. For your mayoral campaign, call Maxis (Orinda, CA) at (510) 254-9700.

Maxis' SimCity 2000 will take urban planning to new heights, adding freeways, schools, and sewers.

THE SPORTING LIFE

Electronic Arts will bring **NHL Hockey** to the PC (price unavailable). Licensed by both the NHL and NHLPA, this game features the actual pro teams, logos, and players, and lets you coach or play. Sports announcer Ron Barr provides the running commentary. Call Electronic Arts (San Mateo, CA) at (415) 513-7555.

"Sunday is a great day to hit somebody," says football's Mike Ditka, who's working with Accolade on **Mike Ditka Ultimate Football II** (price unavailable). Building on the original, Football II offers a play editor, a team constructor, multiple camera angles, and a blend of arcade action and armchair coaching. Sportscaster Al Michaels calls the plays, as he does in Accolade's upcoming **Brett Hull Hockey** (working title; price unavailable). Call Accolade (San Jose, CA) at (800) 245-7744.

Spectrum HoloByte will transfer the popular **Joe Montana NFL Football** from the Sega Genesis to the PC (price unavailable). Montana features the actual teams, and lets you coach as well as quarterback. Another title from Spectrum HoloByte lets you throw your manners out the window: **Beastball** (price unavailable) promises futuristic football with man-made mutants (a few too many steroids, perhaps?). Call Spectrum HoloByte (Alameda, CA) at (510) 522-3584.

If you have a hard time deciding on a favorite sport, MicroLeague will offer **Sports Pro Pak** ($49.95). Pro Pak features both MicroLeague Baseball 4 and MicroLeague Baseball 2 coaching simulations. You can reach MicroLeague (Newark, NJ) at (708) 291-1616.

In the next move in sports celebrity licensing, Electronic Arts signed a multi-year licensing agreement with basketball star Shaquille O'Neal, who will design a new line of basketball games. O'Neal said "I'm looking forward to integrating my hard-slamming, jamming, intimidating, in your face style into their games." Call Electronic Arts (San Mateo, CA) at (415) 513-7555.

"USE THE ROOK, LUKE"

STAR WARS CHESS (price unavailable) will feature animated chess pieces based on the beloved Star War characters. Hailing, hailing, the gang's all here. See Luke, Leia, Darth, and R2D2 in Software Toolworks' upcoming title. For personal safety, let the Wookie win. Call Software Toolworks (Novato, CA) at (415) 883-3000.

YOU CAN FLY

Microsoft announced version 5.0 of its popular **Microsoft Flight Simulator** (price unavailable). The simulator promises photo-realistic 3-D graphics, an improved interface, sound board support, more realistic flight dynamics, and an expanded flight school.

Not satisfied with just ruling the air, the company moves to the final frontier with **Space Simulator 1.0** (price unavailable), which allows you to choose from a variety of spacecraft to explore a universe based on NASA data. For scheduled departures, call Microsoft (Redmond, WA) at (206) 882-8080.

HOMEY DON'T PLAY THAT

Based on television's irreverent *In Living Color*, Capstone will release **Homey D. Clown: The Computer Game with an Attitude** (price unavailable). Homey roams the streets of New York to audition for his new TV show. This guy is no Bozo as he deals with the New York subway system, rude taxi drivers, street thugs, security guards, and snobby receptionists.

And, when you're ready for some down-home hospitality, you can "come and play a story 'bout a man named Jedd" in Capstone's upcoming **Beverly Hillbillies** (price unavailable). The game revolves around an oil field that our favorite mountaineers discover in their own backyard.

If you'd like a different kind of escape, **Discoveries of the Deep** (price unavailable) lets you explore the ocean and clean up the wreckage of a sunken nuclear submarine. You can also take a look at the Titanic, or recover treasure in seven undersea missions.

You can reach Capstone (Miami, FL) at (800) 468-7226.

HE'S DEAD, JIM

Interplay Productions will offer **Star Trek: Judgment Rites** (price unavailable), which provides eight new episodes in the vein of the successful **Star Trek: 25th Anniversary**. Like the first game, Judgment Rites is a combination flight simulator and adventure game. If your ship "canna take any more," get out and adventure.

Interplay's **Stonekeep** is the highly-touted and much-anticipated epic adventure game with 3-D rendered dungeons and full-screen graphics. You'll explore sewers and subterranean realms, and have run-ins with various creatures in different subplots. Also, look for the upcoming **Dungeon Master II: The Legend of Skullkeep** from the creators of Dungeon Master and The Bard's Tale. For more information, call Interplay (Irvine, CA) at (714) 549- 2411.

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

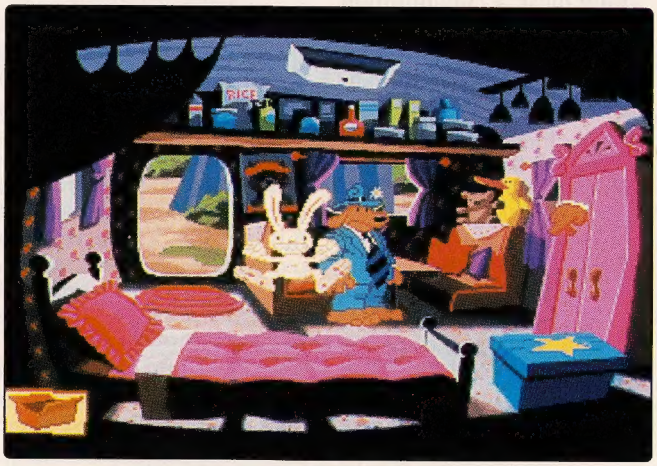
Another LucasArts title, **Sam and Max Hit the Road** (price unavailable) is the story of two freelance partners — a police dog and his wisecracking, in-your-face rabbit. They take a road trip across the nation in search of the legendary Bigfoot. For more information, call LucasArts (San Rafael, CA) at (415) 721-3333.

OH, SAY, CAN YOU CD

-ROM continues to win converts, as more and more publishers support the medium.

Brøderbund is working on several CD-ROM titles, including **The Myst** (price unavailable), a surreal adventure game for grown-ups from the designers of **Cosmic Osmo** and **The Manhole**. Brøderbund is also expanding its Living Books line into children's poetry with **Jack Pretlusky's New Kid on the Block** (price unavailable). Another new Living Book offers Brøderbund's multimedia treatment of Aesop's classic fable, **The Tortoise and the Hare** (price unavailable). For more information, call Brøderbund (Navato, CA) at (415) 382-4400.

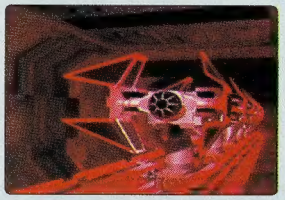
The Software Toolworks rides the CD-ROM wagon in a big way. **Mario is Missing** (price unavailable) is the first in a series of PC CDs for children 8 through 12. This program features those stars of screen and joystick, the Mario Brothers, in a CD geography adventure with sound, video, and digitized pictures. The company also promises high-flying multimedia adventure in **Space Shuttle** (price unavailable). You train at the Johnson Space Center, and ultimately join astronauts on some 50 shuttle missions. Going down where it's better and wetter, **Oceans Below** (price unavailable) lets you visit shipwrecks, underwater formations, and creatures in a first-person diver perspective.



LucasArts' Sam and Max are an outrageous pair who hit the road to hunt for Big Foot.

THE DARK SIDE

If you've always rooted for the dark side, LucasArts offers you a sequel to its popular X-WING. Called TIE FIGHTER (price unavailable), in this one you pilot a ship for the evil Empire and Lord Vader himself. You'll fly training sequences, combat missions, and a tour of duty against those goody-two-shoes Rebels in their X-Wings. For more information, use the Force, or call LucasArts (San Rafael, CA) at (415) 721-3333.



Fly the Dark Side in LucasArts' upcoming TIE FIGHTER, the sequel to the highly rated X-WING.

Their most dangerous adventure, **Capitol Hill** (price unavailable), lets you assume the role of a Congressperson in Washington, D.C. You meet with your staff and vote on bills. If all doesn't go well, just blame your advisors, then call Software Toolworks (Novato, CA) at (415) 883-3000.

Legend (Chantilly, VA) will bring the hilarious **Eric the Unready** to CD-ROM ($59.95). Spin the silver platter and rescue Princess Lorealle from treacherous Queen Morgana and Sir Pectorals. You'll also meet Fran the Used Rock Salesman and the dreaded attack turtles in this funny text-adventure game. For more information, call Accolade (the distributor; San Jose, CA) at (800) 245-7744.

Virgin Games is working with actors Sylvester Stallone and Wesley Snipes on an interactive CD-ROM version of the upcoming movie ***Demolition Man*** (price unavailable). While many computer games based on movies use snips from the film, Virgin Games is shooting special footage for the game. And if the space in **Virgin's Monopoly Deluxe** isn't big enough for your thriving enterprise, you can satisfy your capitalistic tendencies in **Monopoly Deluxe CD-ROM** ($74.99). The game offers full-motion video of properties filmed in Atlantic City. Like the floppy version, it features sound effects and animated tokens. Pass Go, or call Virgin (Irvine, CA) at (714) 833-8710.

ICOM announced its upcoming **Sherlock Holmes, Consulting Detective Volume III** ($69.95), the third in the series. Volume III features the same interactive movie game of the previous Sherlocks, but offers three new cases — the Solicitous Solicitor, The Banker's Final Debt, and The Thames Murders — on CD-ROM. It's hardly elementary. More impressive is **Dracula Unleashed** (price unavailable), something you can really sink your teeth into. This game combines horror, suspense, and romance in Victorian England, where you'll gather information, contacts, and objects to help you destroy Dracula. With 135 scenes, 96 minutes of color video, and 50 minutes of audio, the game promises sheer terror on CD-ROM. Call ICOM (Wheeling, IL) at (708) 520-4440.

Icom's Dracula Unleashed is sheer terror on CD-ROM.

EduQuest, a collaboration between IBM and American Laser Games, will offer **Mad Dog McCree** (price unavailable) on CD-ROM. This arcade port features live actors, and puts your six-gun shooting skills to the test. EduQuest will also release stories in its home reading series — The Three Billy Goats Gruff, The Carrot Seed, and The Little Red Hen ($79.95 each). EduQuest (Atlanta, GA) can be reached at (800) 758-HOME.

Electronic Arts will release its first CD title, **The Labyrinth** (price unavailable). This fantasy adventure game offers graphic and logic puzzles that converge on space and time. For more information, call Electronic Arts (San Mateo, CA) at (415) 571-7171.

Knowledge Adventure will introduce **Undersea Adventure** ($59.95, $79.95 on CD-ROM), the seventh in its series of interactive books. Undersea features an introduction by Jacques Cousteau and lots of fish. Call Knowledge Adventure (La Crescenta, CA) at (818) 542-4200.

Tsunami announced CD-ROM versions of **Ringworld**, the Larry Niven science fiction adventure; **Wacky Funsters**, Tsunami's arcade satire; **Protostar**, its space exploration role-play game; and **Blue Force**, an upcoming police adventure story written by Jim Walls (prices unavailable).

These CD-ROM titles promise original stereo soundtracks and audio interviews with the game's designers, and will feature mixed modes, so you can listen to the audio portions on your home or car audio CD player. For more information, call Tsunami (Coarsegold, CA) at (209) 683-8266.

POTPOURRI

Continuing Frederik Pohl's Heechee Saga, Legend (Chantilly, VA) will release **Gateway II: Homeworld**. In this text-adventure game you'll explore planets; battle robots, dinosaurs, and a race of humanoids; and activate a remote Heechee rescue station. For more information, call Accolade (the distributor; San Jose, CA) at (800) 245-7744.

Virgin Games' **Beneath a Steel Sky** ($62.99) promises a comic-book style adventure game. In the future, six corporations rule the world. By destroying Earth's ecology, they ensure that the world answers to them as they provide the only livable habitation. Anyone who rejects them is relegated to the wastelands known as The Gap (no, you can't buy yuppie clothes there). You must rid the city of the oppressive corporations. Call Virgin (Irvine, CA) at (714) 833-8710.

Tsumani has decided to relaease a sequel to **Wacky Funsters!** It's called (what else?) **Wacky Funsters! Too: The Geekwad's Guide to the Galaxy** (price unavailable). Like the first title, it's a collection of satirical arcade games. In **Beefvender**, you rescue cows from the Bovine Liberation organization, while **Phlegmings** offers sticky golf on the planet Phlegm. You get the idea. You can contact Tsunami (Coarsegold, CA) at (209) 683-8266.

Bethesda announced a mission disk for **Terminator 2029**, called **Terminator 2029: Operation Scour** (price unavailable). It features 12 new missions in the all-out war to destroy Skynet. Bethesda also has **Delta-V** (price unavailable), a space adventure in which you race netrunners down a virtual trench. For further information, call Bethesda (Rockville, MD) at (301) 926-8300.

ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER DOLLAR

AT&T and Sierra On-Line (Coarsegold, CA) have signed a letter of intent to form a strategic alliance. The result: AT&T and a private investment firm gain equity positions in The Sierra Network, Sierra's gaming service. AT&T has been moving into the field of interactive entertainment and has made similar investments in other entertainment-related businesses, including 3DO.

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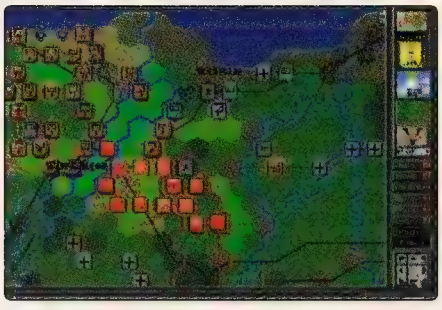
THIS MEANS WAR

SSN-21 Seawolf will be Electronic Arts' sequel to the popular **688 Attack Sub**. The real Seawolf, still on the Navy drawing boards, will be the fastest, deepest-diving, and most heavily-armed U.S. sub. Electronic Arts promises the most advanced simulation to date. Call Electronic Arts (San Mateo, CA) at (415) 571-7171.

SSN-21 Seawolf is a simulation of the Navy's fastest, and deepest-diving submarine, and a sequel to 688 Attack Sub.

NovaLogic (Tarzana, CA) will offer two new mission disks (price unavailable) for its **Comanche Maximum Overkill** helicopter simulation. The new missions will take you to snow-covered valleys and the ocean; new enemy weaponry includes Russian gun jeeps, SCUD launchers, and HIND 24 Gunships. For your application to the rotary club, call Electronic Arts (the distributor; San Mateo, CA) at (415) 571-7171.



Three-Sixty's Gold-Juno-Sword is the latest in the V for Victory Series.

Three-Sixty Pacific will release the fourth in the **V for Victory** series with **V for Victory: Gold-Juno-Sword** (price unavailable), a simulation that covers the British and Canandian end of the invasion at Normandy. New features will include additional terrain types and weather effects. **High Command** (price unavailable) is set in 1939 and has you leading either the Allied or Axis forces to victory. **Victory at Sea** (price unavailable) offers strategic and tactical battles on the ocean. You direct campaigns at the task-force level, but when opposing forces move within range, the game switches to a more-detailed ship-by-ship control. Call Three-Sixty Pacific (Campbell, CA) at (408) 879-9144.

MindCraft has several new titles on the boards. In **Siege: Walls of Rome** (price unavailable) real and legendary armies assault fully detailed castles. The program features an editor to create "what if" campaigns that bring together armies from different eras. **Dominion** (price unavailable) combines diplomacy, intrigue, economics, politics, and war in an epic strategy game. And, in the upcoming **Star Legions II** (price unavailable), you defend the Krellan Empire and protect your planet. Call MindCraft (Torrance, CA) at (800) 525-4933.

Spectrum HoloByte is out in force with **MiG-29: Deadly Adversary of Falcon** (price unavailable), the latest add-on disk for Falcon 3.0. If you'd like further information, call Spectrum HoloByte (Alameda, CA) at (510) 522-3584.

This summer's Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago saw the release of some promising new PC games.

ON A ROLE

MINDCRAFT'S **Bloodstone — An Epic Dwarven Tale** (price unavailable) is a fantasy role-playing game set in a world of ancient Dwarven tribes, where you search for the legendary axe of Khamalkhad. **Strike Squad** (price unavailable) offers futuristic role-play and battle strategy. You are given missions on a variety of planets, and select crew members to confront the different alien forces. **Gryphon Masters of Havlar** (price unavailable) will be the first in MindCraft's **Realms of Fate** series of role-playing games. I'm sure it will hold a candle to **Magic Candle**. For more information, Call MindCraft (Torrance, CA) at (800) 525-4933.

ReadySoft announced its upcoming **King's Ransom** ($59.95) role-playing game. In a distant land, the forces of evil are trapped inside crystals. Travel through forests and six different cities, talk with 500 characters, and battle some 40 different monsters. For more information, reach ReadySoft (Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada) at (416) 731-4175.

Bethesda will release its first fantasy role-playing game with **The Elder Scrolls, Chapter 1: The Arena** (price unavailable). Elder Scrolls offers 360-degree rotational movement, so your characters can circle, jump, duck, thrust, and slash. The game also contains more than 400 cities, towns, and villages, and 2500 magical items. Call Bethesda (Rockville, MD) at (301) 926-8300.

SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE

If your computer monitor isn't big enough for your PC gaming action, you might equip your TV with the VGA to TV Elite ($399) from Advanced Digital Systems. This PC-to-video converter, compatible with any VGA card, delivers a high-quality picture on your television. Call Advanced Digital Systems (Cerritos, CA) at (800) 888-5244.

Spectrum HoloByte warped into CES with Star Trek: The Next Generation, an epic PC adventure.

Virgin enters the fantasy role-playing genre with **Lands of Lore: The Throne of Chaos** ($59.95). It seems that an agent of the dark army, who can assume the image of a young woman, bat, or bird, has poisoned the king. As the game progresses, this shape-shifter becomes ever more dangerous as you search for a way to cure the King and defeat this agent. Call Virgin (Irvine, CA) at (714) 833-8710

SSI is launching three new titles: **D&D Stronghold** ($59.95), **D&D Fantasy Empire** ($59.95), and **Archon Ultra** ($59.95). D&D Stronghold is a kingdom simulator (SimKingdom?) that lets you build and expand your realms against all odds. D&D Fantasy Empire features a computerized dungeon master who casts spells, and shows displeasure with your moves. In Archon Ultra, you try to conquer the Archon board by capturing enemy pieces: During conflict the game moves to arcade battle. For more information, call SSI (Sunnyvale, CA) at (408) 737-6800.

Twin Dolphin Games will offer **Forgotten Castle: The Awakening** (price unavailable), a first-person, 3-D scrolling game. After a prince learns the truth of his heritage on his mother's deathbed, he embarks on an adventure that takes him through a castle and dungeons. Call Twin Dolphin Games (Redwood Shores, CA) at (415) 637-9300.

JUST FOR THE KIDS

The Learning Company announced a new enhanced version of **The Children's Writing and Publishing Center** ($69.95). With this program, children can create illustrated reports and newsletters. Call The Learning Company (Fremont, CA) at (510) 792-2101.

After a freak accident at a fireworks factory, every kid's favorite pint-sized compact car finds himself on the moon in Humongous' **Putt-Putt Goes to the Moon** (price unavailable). After hooking up with Rover, a sad and lonely lunar terrain vehicle, our hero finds a way to get back to Earth. In a release much like the **Putt-Putt Fun Pack**, it's Fatty Bear's turn in **Fatty Bear's World Pack**, a combo pack that offers six activities emphasizing math and logic. Call Humongous (Woodenville, WA) at (206) 487-0505.

Mindplay unveiled three new titles in its Educational Arcade line. **Easy Street** ($49.95) features a shopping trip hindered by a love-struck gorilla in action that reinforces reading and math for ages 3-8. In Math Magic ($49.95), Wizrow the sorcerer needs your help to free trapped dragons. Counting, addition, and subtraction skills aid you in your quest. In **Dyno-Quest**, (price unavailable) you're transplanted back to the day of the dinosaurs. As Captain Time Bound, you trade information while you learn about decision making, risk taking, and map reading. Call Mindplay (Tucson, AZ) at (800) 221-7911.

Sponsored by the Letters E and A, the Children's Television Workshop announced a long-term exclusive agreement to create interactive programs for computers, CD-ROM, cartridge, and the 3DO Interactive Multiplayer with Electronic Arts. The titles will be distributed as part of Electronic Art's EA KIDS division. You can reach Electronic Arts (San Mateo, CA) at (415) 513-7555.

Talking jaguars, unusual animals, and time-warping blue mists are all part of MECC's new **Amazon Trail** ($49.94). You'll navigate your way down a perilous river as you chart your course, manage your supplies, fish for food, and trade for goods. If you make it, you'll find the hidden Inca city. For more Amazon travel information, you can contact MECC (Minneapolis, MN) at (800) 685-6322, ext 549.

Davidson has several edutainment titles in the works, including those from its affiliated labels. **Math Blaster: In Search of Spot** ($49.95) features activities like Trash Zapper, Number Recycler, Cave Runner, and Math Blaster to reinforce mathematics for kids 6-12. New additions from the previous Math Blaster Plus are Cave Runner and a find-Spot storyline. For Windows, Davidson will offer **Kid CAD** ($49.95) for ages 7 and up. The program will feature 3-D scrolling and tools that let kids manipulate on-screen objects, work with perspectives, and build structures. **Alge-Blaster 3** ($49.95) is a Windows-supporting upgrade to Davidson's algebra course, which covers a full year of algebra. For more information, call Davidson (Torrence, CA) at (800) 545-7677.

New from Lawrence is **Discovering America** ($79.95). This program takes students on an expedition through the wilderness, where they encounter Indian tribes, wild animals, European explorers, and ancient ruins. **Mathology** ($49.95) is an arcade game where correctly answered math

SAVE THE SCREENS

As if life doesn't have enough ups and downs, Road Scholar has developed COASTER ($59.99), a screen saver that displays a 3-D roller coaster ride on the screen. Call Road Scholar (Houston, TX) at (713) 266-7623 for more information.

How do you top flying toasters and Captain Kirk? Berkeley Systems will fill your screen with dalmatians, ducks, talking puppets, and singing mermaids in The Disney Screen Saver ($59.95). Call Berkeley (Berkeley, CA) for the bare necessities at (510) 540-5535.

problems give warriors the power to flip, jump, duck, and shoot their way to victory. There's nothing like a little action and mayhem to get math interest flowing. **Mind Castle** ($59.95) builds vocabulary skills. You're zapped into a frog by an evil magician, and to escape, you have to solve riveting word puzzles. Call Lawrence (Gallesburg, MN) at (800) 421-4157.

Creative Pursuits (Los Angeles, CA) will offer **Kid Rhymes** ($29.95), an add-on to Davidson's **Kid Works 2** and Brøderbund's **Kid Pix**. Kid Rhymes includes dot-to-dot pictures, a coloring book, a maze, hidden images, and a picture gallery. For more information, call Davidson (the distributor; Torrence, CA) at (800) 545-7677.

FLYING HIGH

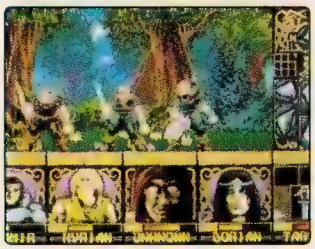
Mallard offers wannabe pilots all the toys they could possibly want. Mallard's scenery disks ($49.95 each) will support Microsoft's **Flight Simulator 5.0**. Using ray-traced images, Mallard promises photo-realistic scenery and clouds that "wisp past your screen." You'll buzz Washington, D.C., Seattle, San Francisco, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Diego.

If you want to try something different, **Tower** ($69.95) lets you step into the shoes of a stressed-out air traffic controller. You'll have the time of your life controlling incoming and outgoing traffic at Washington National or O'Hare. You can call Mallard (Flower Mound, TX) at (214) 539-2575.

THE TAX MAN COMETH

Facing the IRS (The Interstellar Revenue Service) is always tough. In Psygnosis' **Innocent Until Caught** ($59.99), you'll find yourself saddled with an enormous tax bill, and you have only 28 days to pay it off. So you roam the city's bars, and wheel and deal to beat the taxes.

In **Arborea Journey to the Inner Sanctum** ($49.99) you'll lead your team in a quest to vanquish the treacherous Krog. You'll have to fight, cast spells, and develop your fellow characters' skills to make it to the top.



Psygnosis' Arborea Journey to the Inner Sanctum

How about trying to extract members of a political party held hostage by a rival faction? In **Hired Guns** ($59.95), you'll fight through 20 battlezones; collect weapons, scanners, manipulators, and food.

In other news, Sony Electronic Publishing acquired Psygnosis, which will continue to develop software under the Psygnosis brand name, as well as for Sony's video game division, Sony Imagesoft. Call Psygnosis (Cambridge, MA) at (617) 497-5457.

IT'S ABOUT TIME

Go back, way back, with Victor Vector and Yondo to retrieve Tyrannosaurus Rex's egg. In **The Last Dinosaur Egg** (price unavailable) you'll see that time travel isn't all that it's cracked up to be. Deal with malfunctioning equipment, dense jungles, swift rivers, and dangerous dinosaurs in this adventure series by Sanctuary Woods Multimedia Corporation (Victoria, British Columbia, Canada).

With narration, word definitions, songs and activities, The **Selfish Giant** (price unavailable) is the story of a giant who bars children from his garden, and suffers nature's retribution for his stinginess. The bigger they are, the harder they fall. Call Electronic Arts (the distributor; San Mateo, CA) at (415) 513-7555.

YOU'RE ON A BARREL ROLL

Origin Systems continues to create worlds. While the Wing Commander's humans battle the cat-like Kilrathi, seedy mercenary ace pilots, pirates, and entrepreneurs along the Kilrathi border are out to make a buck. With the proven Wing Commander technology, strong characterizations, and an interstellar secret that could be the end for both humans and the Kilrathi, **Privateer** ($79.95) may fly to new heights.

If you tire of Wing Commander (yes, it could happen), you can create your own missions with **Wing Commander Academy** ($49.95). Academy also introduces new spacecraft and weapons.

In role-playing action, Origin is joining forces with Electronic Arts to develop **Spellcaster** ($79.95), a first-person perspective adventure. The game will feature the Shadowcaster, a shape-shifter who can be anything from a frog-man to a cloud.

Finally, Origin will release **Ultima VII, Part Two: Serpent Isle — The Silver Seed** ($29.95), which requires **Ultima VII Part Two: Serpent Isle**. Call Origin (Austin, TX) for more information (or an explanation) at (800) 245-4525.

MORE XANTHS, PLEASE

The newest adventure game from Legend is **Companions of Xanth** ($59.95). Based on the Xanth novels by Piers Anthony, the game lets you explore a magical world where the elves, ogres, demons, golems, centaurs, and dragons roam. **Companions of Xanth** features Legend's new point-and-click interface. Call Accolade (the distributor, Chantilly, VA) at (800) 245-7744.

MORE POTPOURRI

Softstar Information (Taipei, Taiwan), a newcomer to the States, has some upcoming titles. In **Devil's Advocate** (price unavailable), the Lord of DevilWorld unleashes evil beasts and spirits across the land. As DragonTiger Jang, you take on all comers. **Mirage Thunder** (price unavailable) offers space arcade action as you fight off waves of alien attackers in your spacecraft. **Commander Chuckie** (price unavailable) lets you control an F-38 in a humorous arcade adventure. Also, to help you with all this arcade action, Softstar offers the **Joymouse** joystick, a Sega Genesis-style controller that emulates keyboards as well as mice. ❑

GO, SPEED RACER, GO!

Accolade is hoping to cash in on the burgeoning Seventies retro fad with a game version of the recently resurrected Speed Racer cartoon. SPEED RACER (price unavailable) will be a driving simulation, and, although the game concentrates on car racing, it will feature characters from the cartoon, including Trixie, Sparky, Chim Chim, Pops Racer, daughter Judy (not!), and the mysterious Racer X. For more information, call Accolade (San Jose, CA) at (800) 245-7744.

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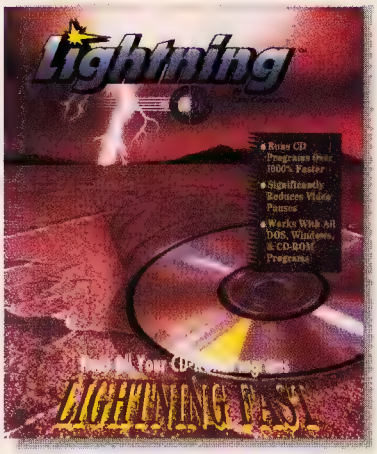
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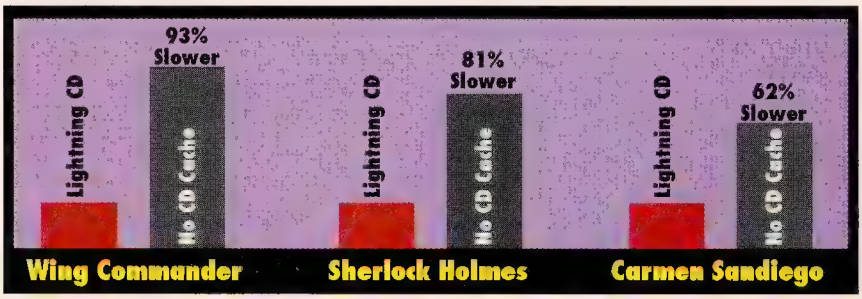

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Circle 98 on Reader Service Card

By Peter Olafson

ATLANTIS TO ATLANTA

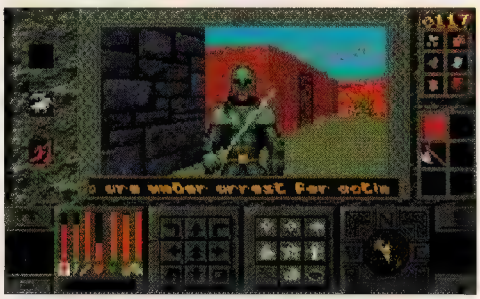
The quest for realistic role-playing games.

I was planning to use this column to cry for games without frontiers, when I realized that role-playing games are already broad — huge, in fact. I walked through Britannia from sea to shining sea the other night, and boy, do my feet hurt.

Now think of all the things that role-playing games don't do so well; the list is long, too long. We've got the surfaces down pat, but the guts still aren't there. Keep your SVGA graphics and digitized speech. Keep the intro animations, the free-scrolling movement, and the so-clean-you-can-eat-off-them interfaces. Such sweet features are, by and large, frosting. We need substance. We need to:

■ **Live by real-life rules and expectations.** Standard player/character behavior in role-playing games is plumb crazy. A real-life person who opens every door in town and talks to everyone he sees (standard behavior even in the best games) is a bleeding loon. How about giving us a game that encourages the player to be circumspect? Interestingly, it's a rather mediocre game (SSI's Legends of Valour) that does this best, rewarding the slightest character flaw or funny look with a fine or a turn in the slammer. It's over-done, sure, but it's on the right track.

■ **Build a real parser.** Killing is relatively simple, but there's nothing so difficult as interpersonal communication, a skill only barely reflected in the current crop of games. We need characters who have their own quests, who can speak intelligently and eloquently to their own agendas, who respond to mood and inflection, who argue, whimper, and backstab. D.W. Bradley took some steps in this general direction in Bane of the Cosmic Forge and Crusaders of the Dark Savant, and Chris Crawford's Siboot throws in some of the needed nuance. Still, this is a virtually unexplored field.



Legends of Valour has the right idea — it deviates a bit from the compulsive behavior most role-playing games force on your character.

■ **Wander through more story branches.** These are role-playing games, after all, not simply bedtime stories with stats. You should be able to set aside your quest or quests, settle down, have kids, and live an interesting life making swords or planting barley. Alternate Reality was a solid step in this direction, but it never came to fulfillment. People thought it was a big deal when Bane had four separate endings. I'd like to see a game with 50 — or 100!

■ **Get rid of the monsters.** Have you ever counted how many critters you kill while completing a role-playing game? Thousands. I don't care who (or what) they are, there's something barbaric about that. Even goblins have mothers.

■ **Find a way to describe characters without numbers.** As long as we think in those terms, we'll always know we're just playing a game — not playing a role. I don't even care if there are numbers, so long as we come to understand in human terms how those numbers were generated. Megatraveller II's character generation system is a good example; these people had lives before you signed them up.

■ **Drop the dungeons.** Dungeons are artificial constructs for monster-mashing and experience-getting. They're a device created purely for role-playing games, and they make for a weird, unreal world filled with 10-story skyscrapers inverted under every rock. There are plenty of dark and spooky places to be drawn from real life — sewers, abandoned factories, old fallout shelters, mines. Let's use them.

■ **Cut the fighters/wizards/priests/thief stuff.** It's tired. It was tired a long time ago. We know lots of heroic jobs from our own childhoods: a fireman, policeman, a doctor, a fighter pilot, an astronaut. Imagine playing a Marine corporal or a beat cop with an Ultima Underworld engine.

■ **Stick in a game clock that runs independent of the player.** You miss the boat, and that's your tough luck. Too often, the player becomes the *de facto* game clock, and the game's shifts and changes are attuned to his actions.

■ **Make fewer huge games and more deep ones.**

■ **Survive with just one saved-game position.** You make your bed, you lie in it. In other words, you only get one life to live over. ❑

SOUND GALAXY

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Circle 93 on Reader Service Card.

By Cameron Crotty

20 SECONDS INTO THE FUTURE

Where do flight sims go from up?

The only time I ever get to fly in a *real* plane is when I'm traveling, and even then I never get to ask my wingman for a fence check.

For me, the best part of any commercial flight is the takeoff. The pilot winds up the engines, you get pressed back into your seat, and then the plane kicks you in the butt. The rest of the flight is smooth, it's comfortable — and it's boring.

That's where flight sims are. They're at cruising altitude. Once the hardware got cheap enough and the basic 3-D simulation technology was built, there was little room for improvement. Sure, the window dressing is prettier, the frame rates are faster, the bad guys a little smarter, but we're still flying the same simulators that we were five years ago.

So where do flight sim companies go from up? Not back into the military, that's for sure. Flight sims can't depend on the largess of the Defense Department's R & D budget any more. In fact, military types aren't interested in how hot a pilot is — they just want a great kill ratio — so the next generation of fighters will be easier, not harder, to fly. Good news for real pilots; bad news for sim makers.

Okay, so we'll keep flying the old stuff for awhile. Eventually, though, even loyal Falcon fans will tire of flying the same plane over and over again. What then?

Several companies have left the Earth's atmosphere behind in search of new scenery, offering new animation techniques, but also raising some questions. Origin's Wing Commander raised the bar on 3-D situational awareness, but the in-cockpit action was often reduced to follow-the-bouncing-blip. MicroProse's Mantis experimented with exposing pilots to how objects really act in a frictionless, zero-G environment, but the result was confusing, arbitrary, and not a whole lot of fun. LucasArts' X-Wing may be shaping up as the game of the year, but while the software simulates an easily identifiable craft, the company took the Hollywood approach in imagining space combat as an extension of atmospheric dogfighting. It's entertaining, but is it flight sim?

One of the special demands of flight-sim players is that the software be believable, real. Part of the fun is imagining that you're not just playing a game on your PC, but actually hauling around several million dollars worth of hardware in maneuvers that would make an Air Force instructor wince. It may be BS, but it's part of the deal. But believe something is real when that thing isn't real itself? That kind of circular logic makes my head hurt.

What lies in store for flight-simulation software? Barring a wrenching leap in real-world flight technology, we should expect more realism and more players.

More realism — well, more window dressing, anyway — will come from faster processors and more memory. Display technology is topping out, but frame rates have yet to catch up with the high-class visuals. As we start seeing processors and data busses able to handle video, we'll see flight simulators based on live footage.

The other technology to watch is networking. In just a few years, data transmission rates have doubled, redoubled, and doubled again. In five years, you won't be complaining about a predictable computer opponent — you'll be fuming because your ass is on fire and the bandit that fried you is 3000 miles away, sitting in his living room, laughing. You never know; it might be me.

Right now, flight sims are on autopilot at 30,000 feet. But, if you're like me, your seatbelt is securely fastened and your tray table is in the upright and locked position. Let's hope that industry takes the hint. ❑

> In five years your ass'll be on fire and the bandit that burned you will be 3000 miles away. It might even be me.

We'll keep flying old planes even into the next century, but sooner or later we're gonna want more. What then?

FLASHBACK

Action so life-like, you'll have to keep reminding yourself it's only a game.

And not a movie.

That's because *Flashback* is the only action adventure game that uses movie-making technology to the max. We filmed real actors in motion. Then we brought everything to life on the computer through *rotoscoping*, the digitization and retouching of live action film — *at 24 frames a second!*

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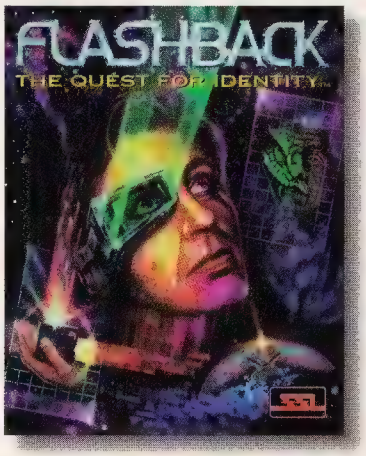

Like a great movie, Flashback combines an intricate plot, exciting music score, superb sound effects, spine-tingling suspense and dynamite action.

Flashback. Now playing at a movie theater... er, game store near you!

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By Gregg Keizer

EDUTAINMENT'S TROJAN HORSE

Kids are primed and ready to get their games from cable TV.

When the TV puts those flickering blue shadows on the wall, the whole family gathers round. Kids get sucked into Nickelodeon, dad channel-surfs until he hits ESPN, mom waits for *Rosanne*. No wonder computer games can't quite compete.

In the not-too-distant future, games won't have to compete, because they'll probably *be* on TV. From the look of things, games for everyone will someday bypass the PC and come straight to the television set. Forget floppy disks, forget VGA graphics, forget squinting into the innards of the machine as you try to install an audio board.

Think cable instead.

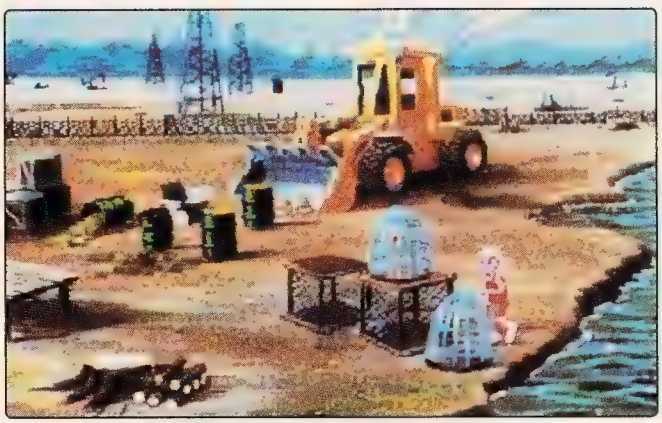
THE PLAYERS

U.S. West, the west coast telephone company, is buying a big chunk of Time-Warner, the multimedia giant that just happens to be the second largest cable owner in the country. Telecommunications, Inc., the largest cable operator, is pitching in with Sega to create a premium channel filled with games, not movies. Everyone else in the telecommunications, computer, and cable industries is setting up partnerships to deliver information and entertainment over the black wire that snakes into virtually every house.

The reasons make sense: America's already jacked into cable, and it offers enough capacity to move digital information. All it needs is the programs to provide a new form of entertainment-on-demand.

More than anything else, kids' games are hobbled by the medium that plays their message. PCs may be cheaper now than ever before, especially those powerful 386- and 486-based boxes that run a bit like lightning, but they're still too pricey for too many families. And they aren't becoming all that much easier to use. Interfaces like Windows aside, a home PC is still a disaster waiting to happen. Hard disk problems, display incompatibilities, sound driver screw-ups, floppies that won't install without a PhD in particle theory.

On the other hand, today's top-notch kids' software makers know their stuff, creatively at least. Companies like Brøderbund, The Learning Company, Davidson, Humongous, and Edmark know how to punch kids' buttons, how to get their attention and keep it while they teach them a thing or two. Even some of the newcomers like Electronic Arts show promise. It'll be a major mistake, and a big waste of talent, if the artists, writers, programmers, and educators at those companies get stuck in the backwater while the big game's played on the TV.



Someday, maybe soon, kids'games like Sierra's Last Secrets of the Rain Forest will play on the TV as well as the PC.

PRIMED AND READY

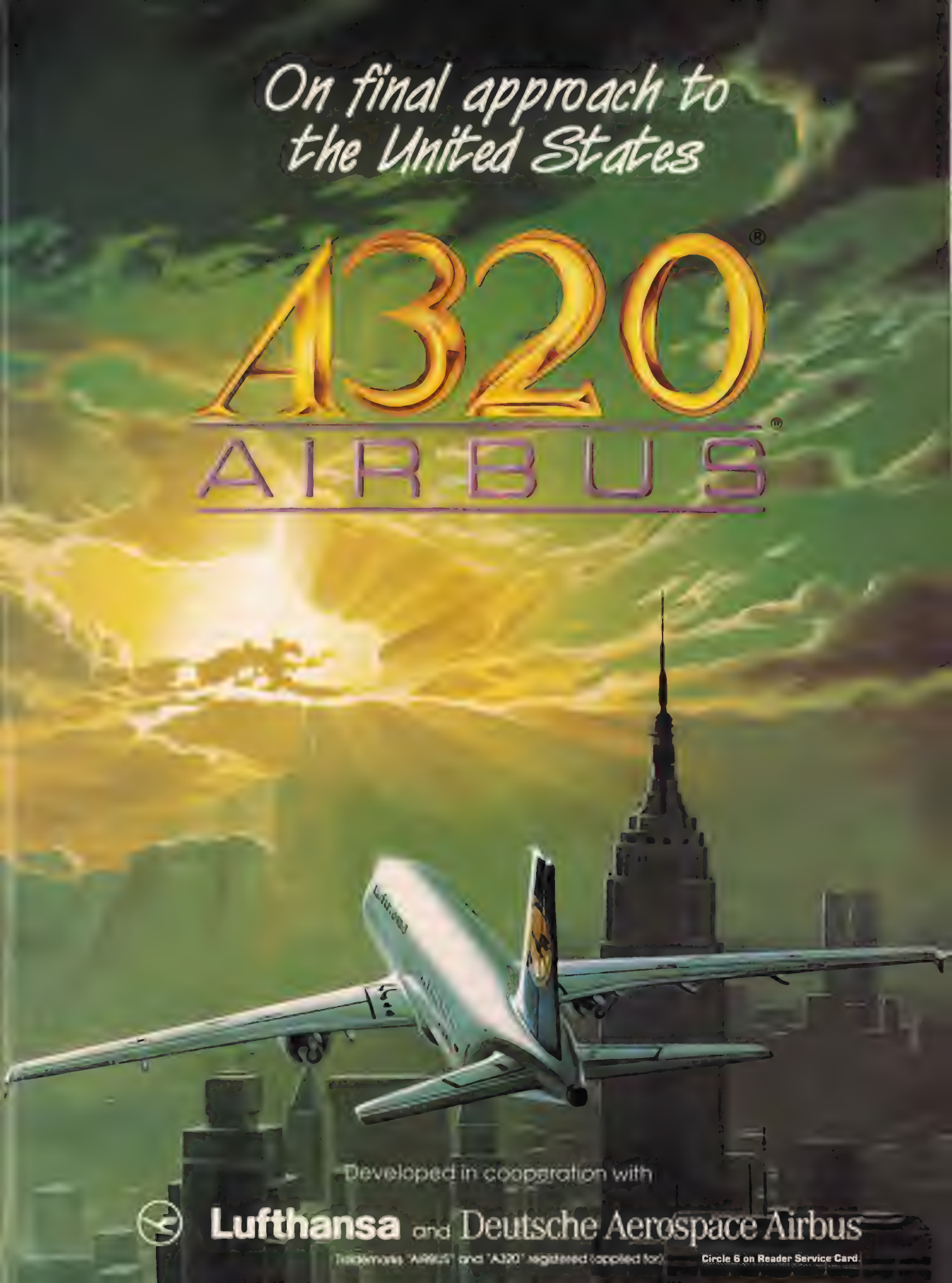
When cable gets its act together — and it will — and starts delivering games to the TV, it's going to put a big dent in the software-for-kids business. More so than in some grown-up categories — kids' games don't typically demand high processing power. They need great pictures, great sound, great music, great speech; things that television already provides.

What's more, kids are used to learning on the TV. They watch "Sesame Street" when they're tots and "Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?" when they're older. They won't balk at playing a math game, a spelling game, a science game on the TV, as long as it's *fun*. Fortunately, the smart companies saw this "edutainment" trend coming, and seem ready.

CREATIVE BORROWING

To prepare, they need to tighten up their interfaces to make them playable from a controller that's more simple than a PC keyboard. (They should look real close at the video game controllers, and how you navigate through those games.) They need to forget about disk space, and start blowing out the speech, sound, and background music. They need to build their graphics so that they're visible on a 19-inch set from halfway across a room.

They need to get on the stick, or they're going to be just shadows of the past, not shadows on the wall. ❑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PCG REVIEWS

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER REVIEWS

20 STRIKE COMMANDER
A flier that's part simulation, part action. 9

21 SNEAK PEEK: BLADE OF DESTINY
An excellent begining to the new Arkania series.

22 SNEAK PEEK: BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR
The story's the thing in this exciting RPG.

22 WHERE IN SPACE IS CARMEN SANDIEGO?
Carmen launches into space. 8

24 EL-FISH
SimFishtank from the makers of SimAnt. 9

26 WORLD TOUR TENNIS
EA lobs tennis into the forecourt of sports sims. 8

27 ROME: PATHWAY TO POWER
History with a witty twist. 8

28 WILSON PROSTAFF GOLF
An excellent choice for rusty duffers. 7

30 PUTT PUTT JOINS THE PARADE
Delightful kids' adventure game. 9

32 ULTIMA VII, PART 2: SERPENT ISLE
New lands for a classic series. 8

33 V FOR VICTORY: OPERATION MARKET GARDEN
A must-have for strategy fans. 8

34 JUMP JET
Harrier simulation leaves pilots harried. 7

66 MAELSTROM
Science fiction, strategy, and adventure. 6

67 FREDDIE PHARKAS, FRONTIER PHARMACIST
Wacky action from the way-out west. 7

70 RINGWORLD
Ragged adventure based on 1970 sci-fi novel. 4

71 ALONE IN THE DARK
A creepy, but exiting, 3-D haunted house game. 8

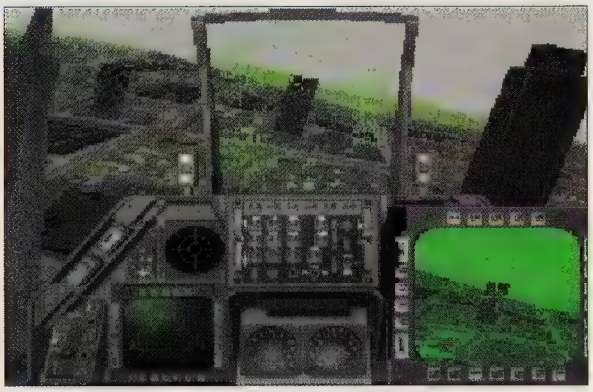
72 SPACE QUEST V: THE NEXT MUTATION
Evidence that humor isn't lost in space. 8

74 SHERLOCK HOLMES CONSULTING DETECTIVE: VOLUME II
A solid sequel to the first Holmes mysteries. 7

78 ULTRABOTS
A futuristic strategy adventure. 8

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Games are rated (1 poor – 10 great) on the basis of graphics and sound quality, playability, and ease of installation within their genres.



Cityscapes are detailed and impressive from the cockpit of Strike Commander.

STRIKE COMMANDER

By Bernie Yee

After delays that would make the Pentagon proud, Origin's Strike Commander is finally flying virtual space inside PCs. For many, the wait will have been worth it. For those shut out by the simulation's high hardware requirements, though, the point is moot.

This is one impressive simulation, closest not to Origin's own Wing Commander series, but to Spectrum HoloByte's wonderfully complex and detailed Falcon 3.0. But Strike Commander isn't perfect. Origin took risks with this title: the already-mentioned stiff hardware demands and, riskier still, the hybrid nature of the game, which is part simulation, part action. It makes Strike Commander's audience a bit hard to define.

CAPITALISTIC COMBAT

With months (or was it years?) of hype now behind Strike Commander, it was inevitable that Origin wouldn't live up to those sky-high expectations — but the company comes close.

Set in 2011, during a time when the global economy is teetering on disaster and global politics have become balkanized, mercenary fighter pilots fly late 20th century fighter aircraft. These mercs are the tools of the rich and famous, of multinational corporations, governments, and revolutionaries. Even the IRS has a squadron (talk about tough audits!). Such is the scene for your character, Brown-hair, a male pilot in the ranks of Stern's Wildcats, a squadron that prides itself on flying only uplifting missions, like bringing relief supplies to besieged government forces.

You must fly your missions successfully, with minimal damage to squadron personnel and equipment, to maintain a profit margin. No profit, no repairs and no more weapons. Meanwhile, competing squadrons are less picky about the work they choose. One in particular, the Jackals, is led by a former Wildcat, and works for the highest bidder. Obviously, it's a scrap waiting to happen.

Each mission and its intervening cinematic sequence moves along much as in Wing Commander, establishing the story, its plots and subplots, its characters and victims. It's this Wing Commander-esque formula of interweaving plot and game dynamics that most clearly separates Strike Commander from the "serious" simulators on the shelves. But, while Wing Commander is essentially a Star Wars-like space opera, the heart of Strike Commander is simulation — more fun than any other, but definitely simulation. Using an advanced form of polygon shading and bitmaps, Strike Commander puts you inside a F-16, then dazzles you with outside scenery. Objects appear finely detailed, yet move and rotate

smoothly. It's first rate, though not equal to Commanche Overkill's outstanding rendition of terrain and ground effects.

CRANING NECKS

Origin takes an original approach in simulating the pilot's view; you can quickly pan through nearly an entire 360-degree circle simply by pressing button two of your joystick (or use the toggle switch on top of a Thrust-Master). You actually get the feel of craning your neck around the cockpit. This is an important feature, since, as pilots say, "lose sight, lose the fight." Origin's implementation is impressive. Given the limitations of sitting in front of a monitor, this technique is sure to be copied by others.

In other ways, Origin shoots itself in the foot. When calling up various information displays in the cockpit, for example, the pop-up window obscures parts of your heads-up display.

Strike Commander's technical feats don't come without a price. The game occupies a minimum of 27 megabytes of hard-disk drive real estate, and with the optional $25 speech accessory pack, takes up a whopping 41 megabytes. And even on the recommended minimum processor, a 486/33, the game's frame rate is less than smooth when you have all the detail settings turned on.

Nor does the realism of Strike Commander come free to its players. There's lots to learn here, as with any detailed flight simulator. The flight model for the F-16 seems solid enough (though not up to hardcore simulators like Falcon 3.0's high fidelity model), which means the nuances of modern air combat need to be observed and respected. Mastering even simple maneuvers like landing requires practice and skill. Veterans of Falcon 3.0 will have their abilities aptly rewarded here, but game players without extensive flight sim experience will find Strike more daunting than something like X-Wing. For them, it's going to be tougher to just jump in and play.

BLADE OF DESTINY

By Barry Brenesal

Germany may be better known for Volkswagens, but with its latest export, Blade of Destiny, the Teutons blitz into fantasy role-playing. This joint effort — created by Attic Entertainment Software, and produced and distributed by Sir-Tech — is the first in the new Realms of Arkania series. Set in a pseudo-medieval Scandinavian world, where cities wage war, Viking pirates roam the seas, and orc parties ravage everything in sight, Blade sets you on a quest to retrieve a legendary sword. It's the only thing the orcs fear more than taxes.

Blade of Destiny is most striking in the way it closely resembles other games. The screen layout could easily be mistaken for The Darkside of Xeen, with action icons on the right and 6 character windows beneath a large first-person view. Its cities, though, seem straight out of Bard's Tale, with three or four different kinds of buildings randomly interspersed. You never know what you'll find.

Similarities aside, this is a well-balanced world where graphics run rampant. If this is any indication of the rest of the series, Arkania's one to watch.

Blade of Destiny, the first in the new Arkania series, looks like some of the best role-playing games around.

STATS AND SPELLS

Blade's battles are handled like a souped-up version of SSI's Gold series, though with much-improved sound and magic effects. Each party member shows as a distinctive 3-D SuperVGA figure on an isometric screen. So do the bad guys.

But, when it comes to stats, Blade takes after Crusaders of the Dark Savant — good news certainly, because nothing fleshes out a group of adventurers like Sir Tech's elaborate statistics. The game provides seven areas of skill that govern 43 activities, including haggling, herb lore, and the ever-popular seducing. The standard roll call of attributes is doubled through the addition of negative traits that affect characters adversely. You might roll up a beserker who's deathly afraid of heights, for example, or a druid who can't control a bad temper.

This world offers nearly 80 spells, which, unlike the magic in most games, aren't automatically effective. Magic casters are rated individually for each spell according to profession, area of study, and attributes. You acquire points to place against spells, gradually increasing their success rate and effectiveness.

Mechanically, Blade of Destiny permits saved games anywhere, but penalizes you if the save takes place outside a temple. Fortunately, there are temples in all the major cities devoted to one or another of the dozen major deities. It's good to support them, for some provide useful miracles to devoted followers.

GOOD THE FIRST TIME

Blade of Destiny won't win any awards for its plot, which is a simple series of quests. At least they're well presented, without the creaking attempts at interactive dialog that continue to bedevil SSI and Ultima products. And, at a time when most companies are cutting back on docs to lower costs, it's nice to find documentation like this: thorough, clever, elaborate — the best in the business.

Some parts of Arkania can stand improvement (though one could make excuses, since this title is the first release in a major new series). Mouse controls are awkward, with no hotkeyed menu selections in sight. There's no provision to print the elaborate stats or maps. And the standardized buildings and generic merchant screens don't supply Arkanian cities with personality. (There's a tradeoff here, of course. Blade requires only seven.)

Still, it's refreshing to play a game where higher experience levels don't invoke the comic book syndrome of super-heroes vs. super-villains. Even magical weapons in Blade of Destiny break, and your party's attributes progress only slightly over the course of the game. And, if battle options are few, at least magic must be cast while standing next to an enemy, something that puts good tactics at a premium. Can your hearty dwarf keep four goblins at bay long enough for your magician to limp over with a powerful incantation on her lips?

With a second release already scheduled for this fall, The Realms of Arkania series is definitely worth following. And worth playing.

Sir-Tech Software, P.O. Box 245, Ogdensburg NY 13669, (315) 393-6633; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; VGA; DOS 3.1 or later; mouse recommended; supports Roland and SoundBlaster; $59.95

BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR

By Barry Brenesal

It makes all the difference when a game starts with good material.

Betrayal at Krondor, the first title in Dynamix's Riftworld Legacy series, isn't just another role-playing fantasy game flush with elves, trolls, swords, and magic, even though it's set in an oh-so-familiar pseudo-Middle Earth world.

First off, Krondor wasn't authored by a group of programmers, but instead was created by Raymond E. Feist, a successful fantasy writer, as an extension of his novels. That's a big difference. Worlds created by programmers are more concerned with manipulating objects, not with plot. Sure, Krondor has objects — weapons, spells, and potions, many of them unique to this fantasy — but they're treated almost casually. Take armor, for instance. In most role-playing games, you'd try to work your party up through increasingly expensive merchandise, like leather harnesses, chain mail shirts, and finally enchanted plate mail. Krondor has only one kind of physical protection to offer. It's called armor.

No, the emphasis in Krondor is on story. It's even divided into chapters. Each chapter begins with a short written introduction. The writing is excellent, a terse narrative with just enough description and dialogue to put some flesh on the bare plot bones. It doesn't try to be poetic, or startlingly creative. It just tries to get you in the right mood — and it succeeds.

This makes for an original and exciting approach to fantasy role-playing. And it makes Betrayal at Krondor something you'll want in your collection.

KRONDOR'S CLICKS

With lots of game development experience, Dynamix uses visuals to convince you that Krondor isn't just another piece of fantasy role-playing software. Its 3-D world is a smoothly-scrolling polygonal landscape that may lack Ultima Underworld-style caverns, but provides plenty of hills, dungeons, and roads to make it come to life. What this game is missing in detail (which can't be helped in polygon-generated terrain) is made up through conversations, discretely bitmapped images, and merchant sequences, as well as rotoscoped animation during battle scenes.

The interface is one of Krondor's real strengths. It may be mouse-based, but it doesn't leave you with a case of Disintegrating Wrist. It's a pleasure manipulating objects this large into exact-fit jigsaw slots, without any chance of missing and misplacing the item — unlike the overwhelmingly cluttered inventories of Ultima.

It's just as easy to travel along Krondor's major roads and trails, since your party automatically turns when the road winds. Want to explore a medieval version of the Ramada Inn, off to one side? Just click on the road icon. The arrow in the center vanishes, and you're free to roam wherever your adventurer's heart desires.

Betrayal at Krondor's interface snaps, but its combat doesn't keep up.

KRONDOR'S CRACKS

The combat, though, is disappointing. It takes place on a two-dimensional field with a fore-shortened perspective. You can defend, cast spells, move, or choose between two kinds of attack. Of the revolutionary artificial intelligence that Dynamix claims, there's little trace. Your opponents gang up on one character or go for the weakest; when badly wounded, they try to leave. No revelations here.

There are only four statistical attributes in Krondor, but each character is also rated for a dozen skills, including weaponcraft and barding. Attributes are hard to increase, but skills rise with use. Skills work sensibly; success at lock-picking, for instance, is determined by your party's highest value, but success at stealth depends upon its lowest.

Krondor's weakest link is its animation. In the preliminary copy we received, the rotoscoped sequences that start each chapter are sometimes garishly lit, making the actors look less like elves than medieval versions of Mr. Spock. And, whenever the rotoscoped images are silhouetted against a bitmapped background in battle, the images didn't quite match.

But that's saying the worst about Krondor. In the end, this story-oriented role-playing debut is top-notch stuff, the stuff role-playing fans will want to pack on their PC's drive.

Dynamix, P.O. Box 485, Coarsegold, CA 93614, (503) 343-0772; IBM PC or compatible, 386 or faster; 590K RAM, 2MB EMS; VGA; DOS 5.0 or later; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, SoundBlaster; at least 15MB free hard disk-drive space; mouse recommended

Though the controls are a touch more simplistic than Falcon 3.0 (the lack of an Identify Friend or Foe button is an annoying omission), Strike Commander tries to cater to both the serious simulation enthusiast and the casual gamer by letting you set several options that turn up either the realism or the playability.

Strike Commander's documentation comes in the guise of "Sudden Death," a soldier-of-fortune-like magazine that outlines the political and social milieu. The second half of the booklet is basic instruction on how to fly an F-16 — less detailed than Spectrum's Falcon 3.0 manual, but adequate. Strike Commander also has a training section, where you can dogfight MiGs and 747s, and blow up incredibly detailed cities along with SAM installations. Patience is key — don't rush in until you play the training scenarios a few times.

In the end, Strike Commander gives you a new place to stretch your wings and clean your claws, and offers a glimpse into the flight simulators to come.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 **9** 10

Origin, 12940 Research Blvd., Austin, TX 78750, (800) 245-4525; IBM PC or compatible, 486/33 or faster recommended; 4MB RAM, 8MB recommended; VGA/MCGA, 256 colors required; DOS 5.0 or later; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, Roland MT-32/LAPC-1, SoundBlaster; hard-disk drive with 28MB free space required; joystick recommended; $79.95

WHERE IN SPACE IS CARMEN SANDIEGO? DELUXE

By Cynthia E. Field

You just can't keep a good woman down. Now you can't even keep her down to Earth.

Brøderbund Software's latest edutainment title, Where in Space is Carmen Sandiego? Deluxe, features

the famous femme fatale and a cartoon-like cadre of alien cohorts that include G. "Whiz" Bang, intergalactic thief and part-time computer virus, and Marcy Bo Koo, the rip-your-eyes-out-ugly spaceship flight attendant. You don't have to be Carl Sagan to get in on the fun as you race through space to catch these scumbags. You just have to be about 12 or older, and curious about the cosmos.

TO THE MOON, CARMEN!

Like earlier releases in the Sandiego series, Where in Space challenges you to solve each case by gathering clues, securing a warrant, and ultimately collaring Carmen or one of her alien crew. At the start of each game the Chief at Acme Detective Agency hands you an assignment as he describes the stolen goods and the scene of the crime, which may be any of 32 places in the solar system. No treasure seems to be beyond these criminals' grasp. Apparently, they'll steal anything: Neptune's trident, the crown from Saturn's Moon Titan, or the Epsilon ring from Uranus.

The latest images from NASA make Where in Space is Carmen Sandiego? more than just a cartoon escapade of outer space sleuthing.

Clue-collecting involves a melange of reality and fantasy. Each game begins with the program's Orbital View screen featuring a digitized NASA image of the crime scene — a planet or moon. Orbital View also displays historical, scientific, and mythological information about the celestial body.

Fade to fantasy. With no more than a mouse-click, you're interviewing an extraterrestrial mall rat who claims to be an eyewitness (or maybe not). You can also visit an intergalactic speakeasy, where tippling tipsters sometimes provide additional information. Clues such as "it bought a wood-burning stove," or, "the rain could etch metal, it told me acidly, but it never reaches the ground," might set you on the right course. Searching for clues is as easy as clicking on the Cosmohopper 911 Turbo spaceship's activity button console.

Detectives can tap the crooks' encrypted frequencies to obtain covert information. They can also launch an Acme Probe to determine if they're hot on the trail or traveling at light speed straight into a dead end. As you climb the ranks from Space Cadet to Sun Admiral, pursuits are more circuitous and you have tighter deadlines.

SPACED OUT

From a parent's or teacher's point of view, one of the game's cleverest devices is Star Search. There you're challenged to move a set of crosshairs to specific coordinates on a celestial map. The map looks like the star field you see when you go a planetarium or look up at a clear night sky. Though it may look like a dot-to-dot sketch at first, these digital stars come to life through simple animation: A lion roars and paws at the ground to represent the constellation Leo; a crab flexes its pincers in Cancer.

Unfortunately, Brøderbund missed an opportunity to teach kids a lesson in mathematics along the way. A Star Search may ask, for example, that you set the map's crosshairs at a longitude of 283 and latitude of -30. These values are displayed with a precision of one and two decimal places, respectively. But, rather than use this to teach kids about rounding numbers (where 282.6 and 29.54 would display the constellation, for example), this game shows the constellation even when you're off the mark. Set the crosshairs at 288.2 and -30.94, and you still see the animation.

Missed opportunity aside, Where in Space is Carmen Sandiego? Deluxe is replete with educational value. The Cosmohopper's VAL 9000 computer (which, by the way, talks when you have an appropriate audio card) contains an extraordinary online database of space information. You can learn about astronauts, astronomy, planets, moons, constellations, even Halley's Comet. You can also use VAL to search for key words from the clues you gather. Though such searches are time-consuming on some systems (on a 16 MHz 386SX, for example, they took more than half a minute), you can use the down time to look through Peterson First Guides: Astronomy, a tidy manual bundled with Where in Space.

This may be the first Carmen to wear a space suit, but many of its game play mechanics will be familiar to anyone who's enjoyed Carmen's exploits on Earth. You can save a game in progress for one or more players, abort a mission, request a new case, or turn sound effects and music off.

Still, it's because this game blasts away from the history and geography kick of its predecessors that Where in Space is so fun. The shift to space science is long overdue, and with Carmen's solid and proven presentation this game will be a boon to parents and a blast to kids.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

Brøderbund Software, Inc., 500 Redwood Blvd., P.O. Box 6121, Novato, CA 94948-6121, (800) 521-6263, (415) 382-4400; IBM PC or compatible, 16MHz or faster; 640K RAM; VGA; DOS 3.1 or later; hard-disk drive with 8MB free space; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, PS/1 Audio Option, Roland MT-32/CM-32L/LAPC-1, SoundBlaster, SoundBlaster Pro, Sound Source, Tandy sound; $79.95

EL-FISH

By Gregg Keizer

Go ahead. Tap on the monitor when no one's looking. Nope, the fish don't skitter away from the glass.

That's about the only thing that the inhabitants of El-Fish don't do. This newest release from the eclectic Maxis — a company profitable by virtue of the classic SimCity, but daring enough to take on everything from genetic laboratories to digital ant farms — puts a virtual aquarium inside your PC. Like a pet store owner with an unlimited inventory, you assemble tanks, breed fish, and add plants and plastic gee-gaws. When it's finished, you sit back and watch the fish swim, not in some two-bit two-dimensional back-and-forth fashion, but in a 3-D space where the movement is natural.

El-Fish isn't a screen saver — it takes up too much memory and way too much hard-disk space for that — nor is it a simulation along the lines of SimEarth or SimLife. You can't really call it a game, either, as there's no beginning, end, or way to win. Think of it as a Zen replacement for a coffee break — a diversion.

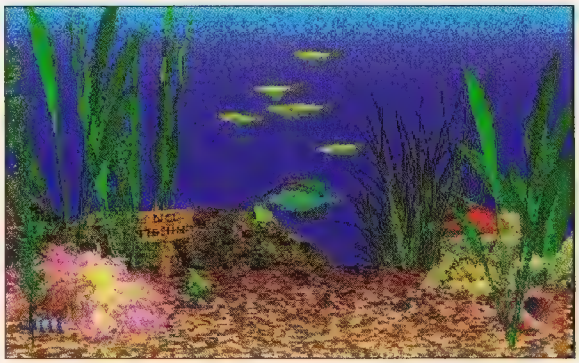
Whatever you call it, El-Fish is the coolest non-game to hit the shelves since SimCity. You'll want a copy, not to impress your friends or astonish the family, but just so you can tap on the monitor from time to time (when you're sure nobody's looking).

CATCH 'EM, BREED 'EM

Like a simulation, El-Fish lets you build things with the PC. In fact, almost everything's customizable, from the aquarium itself to the fish that swim around inside it. You can pick and choose what you want to make using pieces the program provides. Or, if you're the ambitious type, you make the pieces from scratch.

The tank, for instance, can be built from a variety of backgrounds and bottom pebbles. A library of objects — some fixed, others animated — are available for inside the tank, as is a garden of undersea plants that you can resize with a couple clicks of the mouse. Other tank occupants include scuba divers and sea horses, coral reefs, rocks, and toy castles. At your disposal are almost all of the things you can imagine dropping into an aquarium.

But it's the fish, naturally, that take center stage. Here, too, the package offers so many choices that it can honestly call itself an artificial-life generator. You start the fish-making process by catching fish from the ocean, keeping some and tossing others back. You can use these fish as is, but a more intriguing path is to breed two species — more like a gene-splicing process than actually cross-breeding — to build a brand new creature. And, if you want to go for the long term, you can make a fish, then evolve it several generations.



Build the aquarium, stock it with fish, then kick back and relax. Even though it's no game, El-Fish is one whale of a program.

These fish are static, though, until you animate them. El-Fish needs to know how to display the denizens of the not-so-deep, and for that you have to tell it to create the animated frames. This should be your first hint that El-Fish has a monsterous appetite for hardware.

Not only does El-Fish demand almost 10 megabytes of hard-disk space, but it's one of the most processor-intensive packages you can put in your PC. On a 486/33, for example, animating a small fish takes nearly eight minutes. Try that on a 386/25 without a math coprocessor (which is built into a 486's CPU), and the time stretches to nearly four hours. You won't want to play with El-Fish unless you have a lot of time, a 486, or a 386 revved with a math coprocessor.

Other hardware requirements are just as stiff. You'll need 4MB of memory, minimum. And, although its looks pass muster on a VGA card, it's stunning only when running in 640x400 resolution with 256 colors on a Super VGA board. Not every SVGA card can handle the program, though, so check yours against the supported list before you buy.

DANCE LITTLE FISHIES, DANCE

You can set the fish to music, too, simply by telling El-Fish to generate a computerized soundtrack from eight styles. Or, if you're adventurous, you can convert small MIDI files (no larger than 64K) to the program's format. The New Age tunes that come bundled with El Fish go well with the meditative qualities of fish watching.

Other features let you share fish with others (in a compact form that takes just a few kilobytes each; the recipients can then animate the fish themselves to create the much larger movement files), add your own images to the program's object library, and change the colors of almost everything. You can also snap the screen of any tank for later viewing, or, if you're an El-Fish nut, even use it to print a poster-sized shot by sending the TIFF or PCX file to a service bureau.

El-Fish is so hard to categorize that it's almost tough to recommend. It's not a game, but it's loads of fun. It's not a simulation, but it lets you simulate living organisms.

Tough to recommend, but not impossible. Even if you don't care for flounder anywhere but on your plate, the realistic way that El-Fish's fish move is astonishing. They swim close and grow larger, swim away and get smaller. They even exhibit fish-like behavior, turning suddenly in a new

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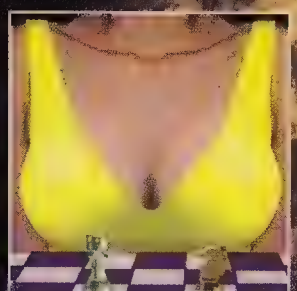

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direction, swimming in schools, and stopping to feed when you drop digital fish food into the top of the tank.

You'll want a big, brawny PC for El-Fish, a 486 if at all possible. You can't run anything else alongside El-Fish (it's not a screen saver, remember?), nor does it run within Windows (at least not on any of my machines).

But I have yet to see one of its inhabitants go belly up, or spiral down the toilet in a watery funeral. El-Fish, a software toy of the first order, is such an unusual diversion from the norm that it may spawn an entirely new category all its own.

I can't wait for El-Dog.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 **9** 10

Maxis, 2 Theatre Square, Ste. 230, Orinda, CA 94563-3346, (800) 336-2947, (510) 254-9700; IBM PC or compatible (486DX recommended); 4MB RAM; 640K RAM; VGA/SVGA (limited support); DOS 3.3 or later; supports AdLib, Roland MT-32, SoundBlaster; mouse required; hard-disk drive with at least 10MB free space required; math coprocessor recommended on 386-based systems; $69.95

WORLD TOUR TENNIS

By Wayne Kawamoto

Blip, blip, blip. Most PC tennis feels more like a glorified game of Pong than Wimbleton-style, world-class sports. Most, but not all.

Electronic Arts' World Tour Tennis serves and volleys realistically enough to draw you down from the stands and into center court, boosting this neglected genre into the forecourt of sports simulations. World Tour Tennis easily aces the arcade tennis games of the past by offering up first-person views, natural ball motion, and unprecedented control over your shots.

15-LOVE

You view the action in World Tour Tennis as if you were looking through the eyes of your player. That's your virtual hand holding the racket; that's your make-believe opponent on the other side of the net. Just as in real tennis, the action here is fast, with natural and convincing ball movements, perspectives, and shadows.

To handle all this imaging overhead, World Tour uses polygon-fill graphics (commonly used in flight simulators) to present tennis in a form that closely follows human motion and the laws of physics. To create naturally moving players, real tennis players were videotaped, then their images digitally manipulated. As in last year's 4D Boxing, also by Electronic Arts, your opponent looks blocky, particularly when you get close to the net. Even at its worst, though, the polygonal players don't detract from the experience. And from across the court everything looks great.

World Tour Tennis offers unprecedented tennis action and shot placement, though the polygon-made players look blocky close up.

Real-life tennis is challenging enough; you can imagine the problems in judging court distances on a two-dimensional computer monitor. Ball shadows and changing perspectives help, but judging 3-D distances on a flat screen — whether football, baseball, basketball, or tennis — is tricky. (That was the greatest flaw in UbiSoft's Jimmy Conners Pro Tennis Tour, previously the premier PC tennis game.)

World Tour Tennis takes care of the problem by taking control of your motion toward the ball. With the footwork out of your hands (so to speak), you can concentrate on returning the ball and placing the shots. As you improve, you can override the PC, position your player on your own, and take risks to make the shots that count. Timing, of course, is crucial to your victory.

World Tour Tennis's first-person perspective is impressive. When you serve, for instance, you start by looking down at the ball in your hand. During the toss, your eyes (and the view on the screen) follow the ball up into the air. As you hit and follow through, you watch the ball sail to the other side of the court.

World Tour Tennis offers excellent shot control, so you can vary the strength behind your strokes and lobs, and add spin to place the ball. The result is the most satisfying PC tennis so far, a game that lets you experiment and use real-world tennis strategy on the PC court.

Here, as in real life, great athletes are made, not born. You can create and customize your tennis players for speed, acceleration, and endurance, as well as provide a name, birthdate, and birthplace. Better yet, you set height, weight, and handedness, and adjust appearance by changing complexion, shirt, shorts, shoes, and wrist bands. As you alter these, you'll watch your player mutate before your eyes.

GAME, SET, MATCH

World Tour Tennis offers clay, grass, and hard surfaces, and dresses up the courts with grandstands, judges to yell at, and even clouds in the sky. More importantly, its 96 computerized competitors won't disappoint. As you would expect, the program tracks ratings, seed, career points, and earnings to date (for even more realism, the game could feature sponsors).

You can compete in exhibition matches, in any of 72 tournaments,

or pursue a full tennis career on the pro circuit. An excellent Practice mode measures performance and provides feedback, and lets you hone your skills before a big tournament. And, like most modern PC sports games, you can record your all-time best volleys and points with a replay camera that's fleshed out with full editing features. You get to change views, zoom in, follow the ball, change the height, and place the camera anywhere in the stadium.

World Tour Tennis does stumble at the net in one respect: It offers no female players, a gross oversight. Electronic Arts has rudely ignored the fact that millions of women play tennis, in its assumption that male PC players are sufficient. A major mistake, if only because World Tour Tennis could have been the game that finally provided a PC sports program attractive to everyone.

Even so, World Tour Tennis is a breakthrough package. For the first time, you can simulate charges to the net, overhead slams, and dirt-digging dives with all the motion, feel, and physics of the real thing.

Advantage, World Tour Tennis.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

Electronic Arts, 1450 Fashion Island Blvd., San Mateo, CA 94404, (415) 571-7171; IBM PC or compatible (286 or faster, 386 or faster recommended; 640K RAM; EGA/VGA; DOS 3.3 or later; hard-disk drive required; supports AdLib, SoundBlaster, Roland; $49.95

ROME: PATHWAY TO POWER

By Cynthia E. Field

Veni, vidi...uh-oh! Real-world political power may be reserved for the chosen few, but in the make-believe universe of the PC, anything's possible. You can even claw your way to the top of an ancient empire when you have ROME: Pathway to Power on your hard disk.

This new strategy adventure game from Maxis, the company that's helped millions of delusional rulers run amok in simulated cities, planets, genetics labs, and ant colonies, sets you on the road to the Eternal City. (See El-Fish, page 24.) Designed for intermediate to advanced gamers ages 10 and up, Rome features a wry wit and a self-deprecating sense of humor. Unless you're a humorless twit — in which case you wouldn't be reading *PCGames* — you'll enjoy the way the game pokes fun at Celtic warriors, British climate, and Italian history. Here's hoping Rome isn't the last role-playing adventure game from Maxis.

EUT TU, BRUTE?

Of course, Rome's version of history isn't exactly what they teach in school. "Some Notable Episodes in the Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire," a chapter in the manual, claims that, "As an autumn holiday for his troops, Julius Caesar decided to let them invade Britain." Right. And the Circus Maximus was found-

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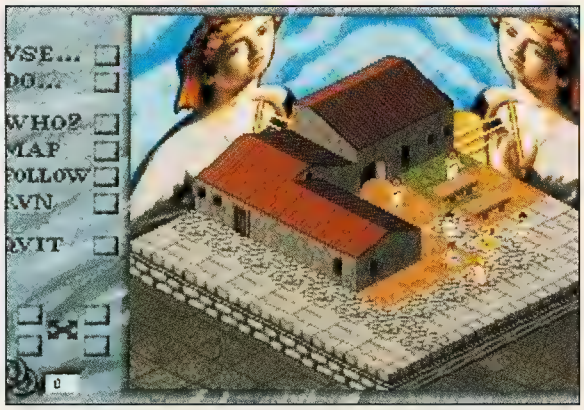
ed as a school to teach slaves the fine art of maiming and murdering each other. Sure.

Even if you don't like your history with a twist, you'll enjoy the otherwise educational aspects of Rome. Besides the sheer skill you need to win the seat of power, you can play the game in English, Spanish, French, German, or Italian. Enrichment activities like these may not be what foreign language teachers have in mind, but students will enjoy respites in Rome as a nontraditional way of honing their language skills. To help you survive in any language, Maxis sends a "Hints & Tips Booklet" free to each registered user.



Rome brings out the best — and worst — of every would-be despot.

ROME: Pathway to Power plays its six levels like a television miniseries. As Hector, a lowly slave who hot-foots it out of Herculaneum just as the volcano Vesuvius begins to belch, you get to take a stab at ascending the emperor's throne. First, though, you must endure a host of difficulties from molten lava and huffy palace guards to a couple of side trips to Britannia and Egypt, where you unleash your troops against the natives.

All's not fun and mayhem, though. You get to make the world a better place by protecting Cleopatra, and along the way meet notables like the Consul Fellonius, the centurian Militarius Conflictus, and the real seat of power, Emperor Gluteus Maximus.

Surviving is hard, but playing is easy. Virtually every game-play mechanism is done through Rome's point-and-click interface. On the left-hand side of the richly colored VGA screen you'll find a tastefully designed (remember, this is a British production) gray marble Control Box. A series of buttons controls your choices, while another set at the bottom of the box lets you keep Hector on the move by pressing and holding the mouse button.

When you click the Use button, for instance, a pop-up box displays your inventory; click on the Do box, and you'll see a series of buttons describing actions available at the level at which you're playing; open up the Military Control Box and you can command your units to advance, halt, attack, rally, rest, and (yes) retreat.

Most of the screen's landscape is devoted to the playing field, which displays just one sector of the game's terrain. When the game opens, you see Hector standing on a plot of ground seemingly suspended in space against a backdrop of Vesuvius, a nice three-dimensional illusion.

As Hector approaches the edge of one sector, the next sector appears. You can usually get a spy-in-the-sky view of the terrain by clicking on the Map button. (Often when you go to Britannia, the map view is obstructed by clouds, yet another sample of the game's subtle humor.) When skies are clear, the map affords a view of people moving about. They look like cars on a freeway below your coast-to-coast flight. Use the map to find the place you'd like Hector to go, click there, and zoom in for a close-up.

JUST DO IT

Some clever animation makes Rome a pleasure to watch. Gladiators lunge; Hector scratches his head when he's confused; other characters walk, run, and even towel-dry their bums at the public baths. Rome's theme music is appealing, yet not distracting. Sound effects heighten the experience, too — you can hear the sizzle and fizz of human flesh as molten lava overtakes Herculaneum, and slaves perish at the Coliseum with Batman-esque expletives. Urgh! Ooof! Gurgle...

Mom wasn't kidding when she said that Rome wasn't built in a day, and you won't be able to rule Rome in a few hours either. Expect to spend days helping Hector survive one challenge after another. (Fortunately, you can save a game that's in progress or save a series of games under different user names.) And, if you succeed in English, you can always try in another language, *n'est pas?*

In the real world, it's hard to imagine anyone except our elected officials sharing Hector's values or condoning his tactics. But in virtual reality, an emperor's gotta do what an emperor's gotta do.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

Maxis, 2 Theatre Square, Ste. 230, Orinda, CA 94563-3346, (800) 336-2947, (510) 254-9700; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; VGA; DOS 3.1 or later; supports AdLib, Roland, SoundBlaster; $49.95

WILSON PROSTAFF GOLF

By Dan Muse

Wilson ProStaff Golf isn't normal. No famous golf courses, no add-on disks, no program packed with features. But, it isn't copy protected, it comes on only one floppy, it takes just over a megabyte of hard-disk space, and it costs only $39.95.

Can Wilson ProStaff Golf make you forget Links or Jack Nicklaus' 18 Holes of Major Championship Golf? Probably not. But it is fun, and easy to learn and play. If it was priced at $59.95 or $69.95, it'd be a tough sell. But at less than $40, it's worth a look.

In fact, Wilson's publisher deliberately positions the game a notch below those golf headliners. In the manual's intro, Konami places Wilson ProStaff Golf below simulations that

"take about as long to play on a computer as a real game of golf takes on Saturday at the public links" and calls their title "a fast game that offers as much visual excitement as a bologna sandwich." It may be damning with faint praise (bologna?), but the game meets its objective.

I DON'T NEED NO STINKIN' MANUAL

Wilson scores high marks in the I-hate-to-read-manuals category. You can be up and down the fairways as soon as the game's installed on your hard-disk drive.

If you've played other golf games, you'll find Wilson's interface familiar; the quality of your shot is determined by timing your swing in a circular power meter. A click on the mouse — or a press of either the Enter key or the spacebar — starts your swing in motion. You click again to determine the force with which to hit the ball. The next thing you see is a large white golf ball with a smaller red circle moving inside it. Your goal is to press the mouse button when the red ball's centered. Of course, if you intentionally time your stroke when the red circle is at the bottom of the sphere, you hit under the ball — useful for getting loft in your shot and putting backspin on the ball. It's usually best to go for the sweet spot, though — dead center. The entire process is intuitive and fairly easy to master.

Putting's the toughest part of playing a round in Wilson ProStaff Golf. The putting power-bar lacks accurate hashmarks.

Every golfer knows that wind is a part of the game (on the course, not just in the clubhouse afterwards). The gauge at the upper right of the screen shows you the strength and direction of the wind. Wind strength is marked with numbers from 0 (no wind) to 9 (nasty stuff). If the flag is pointing to the right and marked with a 9, there are serious crosswinds out there. Unlike other golf games, Wilson's wind plays a part even in the beginners' level.

The expression "You drive for show, but putt for dough" is never more true than in Wilson ProStaff Golf. Putting is a challenge. The status bar at the top of the screen shows you the percentage of the green's slope, for example, 15 degrees to the right, downhill. But this program's putting power meter inevitably causes trouble, primarily because it doesn't include hashmarks to accurately show the 25, 50, and 75 percent power levels. Precision putting is difficult.

Since the game has only one course (Konami says it's considering selling add-on course disks, but at press time had no firm plans), you may quickly tire of playing the same 18 holes every time out. You get some variations, though: You can play best ball, alternate team, aggregate team, straight scramble, match plan, two types of Skins games, bingo-bango-bongo, and more.

What's more, you can register up to ten golfers, that is, list the players' names and attributes, right down to the color of their shirts and hair. Then you select from those ten players before you hit the links. The interface in this part of Wilson isn't very intuitive, but if you get stuck, you can always sink to actually reading the manual.

HOW 'BOUT A ROUND?

If you've played other computer golf games, it's easy to dismiss Wilson

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ProStaff Golf. If you want to design holes, play famous courses, buy add-on disks, and delve into the nuances of the game, this isn't the links simulation for you.

But, if you want an affordable golf game that's easy to use, doesn't gobble megabytes of disk space, and runs well on an ancient 286, Wilson's worth considering.

It did keep my in-laws entertained for more than an hour one Sunday afternoon. I gave them one hole's worth of instruction and then I was off to watch the NBA playoffs. How can you put a price tag on that?

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

Konami, 900 Deerfield Pkwy., Buffalo Grove, IL 60089-4510, (708) 215-5111; IBM PC or compatible (12 MHz 286 or faster); DOS 3.0 or later; supports AdLib, SoundBlaster; mouse recommended; $39.95

PUTT-PUTT JOINS THE PARADE

By Mark Reynolds

If you don't have kids around to play this game at the computer, you're out of luck.

Putt-Putt Joins the Parade is such a delight to play, and its animation so amazing, that it's a shame everyone won't get to see it. No kidding.

You don't even need a suped-up PC to run it. Though the game takes up nearly ten megabytes of hard-disk space, it loads into a measly 550K of conventional RAM. Even more unbelievable, its digitized voices sound as plain as day on a standard-issue PC speaker. (With an add-on sound board, you'll get music as well, and better voices.)

PARADE A PET WITH PUTT-PUTT

The story is simple: Putt-Putt is a little purple car. (Don't like purple? Visit the paint shop.) He hears all about the upcoming Cartown Parade on his car radio and decides he'd like to enter. Trouble is, all the entrants are supposed to bring a pet and a balloon. With that simple premise, Putt-Putt takes off on a road adventure to find a balloon and a pet, and to talk to his friend Smoky the fire engine about getting into the parade.

Anyone who's old enough to hold a mouse or joystick will love Putt-Putt's world. The animation is truly delightful — as colorful and smooth-moving as you'll find anywhere — and each new screen offers plenty of objects for kids to click on and explore. As in most adventures, some objects are things Putt-Putt will need to solve problems. Most, though, are there just for fun. And just because you've clicked on something once, don't think you've seen it all. The next time you click, something different may happen.

Help Mrs. Airbag find her little lost Baby Beep in Putt-Putt Joins the Parade and she just might give you that balloon you need for the parade.

Putt-Putt Joins the Parade is designed to let youngsters explore freely, just for the fun of it. There's no way for kids to make a mistake or get Putt-Putt into trouble. If you forgot something you need, go back and get it. If you try a solution to a problem and it doesn't work, try something else. Anyone who looks around Cartown — meeting such wonderful characters as Mr. Baldini or Mrs. Airbag — will eventually end up with a balloon and a puppy and secure a spot in the parade.

Putt-Putt's easy to get up and running, too. Installation instructions run just a paragraph or so with a few key commands that let you toggle the game features on and off. Beyond that, the manual is really a coloring book. The package is so kid-crazy that it even includes a pencil, pencil sharpener, and a box of crayons.

SMILES PER GALLON

A couple of things may keep Putt-Putt from becoming an endless source of entertainment. The adventure is very easy to solve. Even though it's aimed at kids ages three to seven, few near the upper range will need more than the leisurely half hour I spent looking through the game. Putt-Putt's certainly entertaining enough to play several times, if only because you'll find something new each time. But hours and hours of fun? Maybe not for older kids, though tots seem to love seeing the same things — worms coming out of an apple, bats flying around in the cave — hundreds of times.

And, though this game doesn't take long to play, it should have a save feature for kids (or parents) who want to pick up where they left off. The omission means kids must either finish the adventure in one sitting, or keep starting over from the beginning.

If your kids can handle Putt-Putt on their own, let them control the mouse. They don't need an adult standing over their shoulder, kibitzing on where to take Putt-Putt next. If you really want to play, wait until the little ones are nestled snugly in bed.

Just don't stay up too late. If your house is like mine, you'll need some shuteye. Since this game hit my hard disk, every morning at the crack of dawn I hear, "Wake up, Daddy! It's time to play Putt-Putt!"

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 **9** 10

Humongous Entertainment, 13110 NE 177th Pl., #180, Woodinville, WA 98072-9965, (206) 485-1212; IBM PC or compatible (12MHz 286 or faster); 640K RAM; VGA; supports AdLib, Covox, ProAudio Spectrum, SoundBlaster, Sound Source; $49.95

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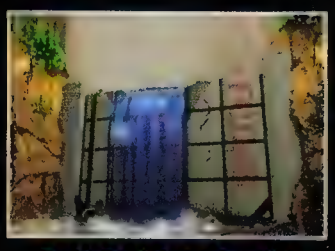

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ULTIMA VII, PART II: SERPENT ISLE

By Peter Olafson

Consistency is its own blessing, and its own curse.

For more than a decade, Ultima, Origin's premier fantasy role-playing series, has been set on the same mythic continent. That's always been part of the line's charm, for returning to Sosaria is a bit like coming back to the old neighborhood.

At the same time, it's also a bit like sleeping in your old bedroom at your parents' house. Perhaps that's why chief designer Richard Garriot added something to the map with each new game: the Underworld in Ultima V, the Gargoyle domain in Ultima VI, the Forge of Virtue in Ultima VII.

In Ultima VII, Part II: Serpent Isle, Garriot escapes Sosaria's boundaries entirely. The change in scenery does the world of Ultima some good.

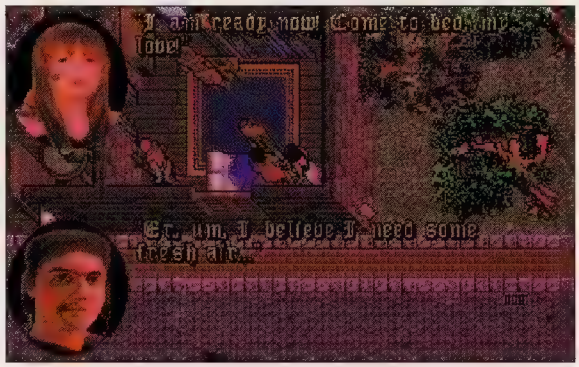
NEW TRICKS FOR AN OLD DOG

It's 18 months after the Avatar thwarted The Guardian's attempt to come through The Black Gate. (Remember him? Big red guy, deep voice, bad teeth?) Not only does the Fellowship lie in ruins, but a magical scroll has turned up among the belongings of its leader, the vanished Batlin. "Make for a rendezvous on the Serpent Isle," the scroll directs. Seems it ain't over until fat mage sings.

So off you go — along with comrades Iolo, Dupre, and Shamino — into a new world dotted with ruins, wracked by storms, and beset by goblins, where the Avatar is unproven and the name Lord British is but a curse. You've barely stepped off the boat when a teleport storm relieves you of some of your nicer belongings and replaces them with things like pine cones and hairbrushes. Smells like quest material to me!

Don't look for too many new wrinkles here. The Part II in the title should be taken seriously; Serpent Isle is to The Black Gate what the two Worlds of Ultima games were to Ultima VI: an extension of the basic game system without any of the generational changes we've gotten used to between Ultimas. It has the same close-up view, the same mouse control, the same overlaid conversations, the same bold special effects. In short, it has everything that made The Black Gate so gorgeous and so charming.

It's charming again here. Maybe more so, as this story seems a bit more tightly knotted than the Black Gate's story did. Serpent Isle has three principal communities — the walled, knightly city of Monitor; the seagoing, Venetian town of Fawn; and the mage enclave at Moonshade — and the residents seem to dislike each other only slightly less than they dislike the weather. Without spoiling anything, let's just say that even the plainest of surfaces may prove deceptive. The game positively throngs with Dickensian surprises small and large.



New scenery marks Ultima VII, Part II: Serpent Isle, but the charm remains the same.

The new terrain game adds an unexpected intensity to Serpent Isle; in earlier Ultimas, you could skip past waypoints like Paws or Yew temporarily. You knew where they were — where they had always been — and you could always come back to them. Here, you're seeing everything for the first time, and will probably inspect them as closely as if you were planning on settling down there. If you're like me, you'll take its beauties less for granted, and live more fiercely in this land. This is an opportunity to rediscover Ultima in full flower.

UP ON THE SOAPBOX

Alas, Serpent Isle also witnesses a resurgence of the series' philosophical bent — an old and bad Ultima habit. Okay, okay, "Chaos + Balance = Order," as the series so often stresses, but in a realistic world, people's remarks merely reflect their beliefs. They don't have to embody them word for word. Serpent Isle goes over the edge in its preachings to the player, hammering home points that would be better left understated. This game needs a little more of the writer's facile touch. In a nutshell, it needs to lighten up.

Serpent Isle also comes across as a little sloppier than Ultima VII. Naturally, in any game of this size — this monster takes up about 23 megabytes, plus around 500K for each of the ten saved-game positions — a few mistakes are bound to creep in. And, while none of them interfere with your good time, even little mistakes are jarring in a world so interlinked and persuasive. At various times, I ran into a character muttering "What do I here?"; present-tense references to characters who had shuffled off the mortal coil; and a pair of ghosts who told me they'd help me once before disappearing in a streaming black cloud. (Sure enough, once the cloud had made its exit, there he was again, across the room. And when I passed his way again, both he and his twin were back at work and their willingness to help was unabated.)

Speed was another failing of The Black Gate — the hard-drive light burned red throughout — and the packaging for Serpent Isle claims improvement of up to 30 percent. That's tough to judge accurately without testing the game engine against benchmarks, but the improvement is discernible. It's still hard-disk intensive when there are more than couple of things happening onscreen, but your merry little band isn't on quite so tight a leash, and that's a relief.

Otherwise, you'll note that the character portraits are larger and more lifelike. And Serpent Isle is our first opportunity — as far as I can remember — to see the Avatar naked as a jaybird, albeit in fleeting fashion. In case you wondered, he carries his sword to bed.

Nice tan! And a nice game.

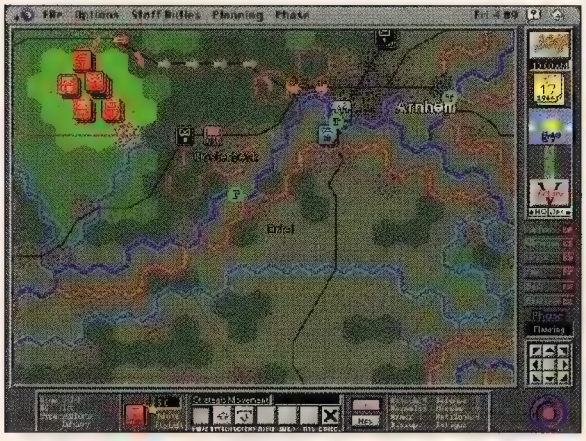
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

Origin, P.O. Box 161750, Austin, TX 78716, (800) 245-4525; IBM PC or compatible (20 MHz or faster recommended); 2MB RAM; VGA (256 colors); DOS 3.3 or later; supports AdLib, Roland MT-32/LAPC-1, SoundBlaster, SoundBlaster Pro ; requires hard-disk drive with at least 21MB free space; mouse recommended; $79.95

V FOR VICTORY: OPERATION MARKET GARDEN

By Ed Ferrell

World War II was the Big One in more ways than we can count. It influenced virtually every aspect of American life in the '40s and '50s, changing the landscape of pop culture through everything from novels like *Catch-22* to movies like *From Here to Eternity*. It gave America paper drives, gas rationing, and Rosie the Riveter. To its generation, The War wasn't just an event, it was life.



Operation Market Garden looks like a board wargame, but it's got one of the slickest interfaces of PC simulations.

But to us Baby Boomers, WWII is ancient history. Fortunately, it's a history that we can experience, if only on the PC. That's what I've done during the past several weeks while playing 360 Software's V For Victory: Operation Market Garden. This new battleset is sure to please the many fans of 360's wargaming system, but be forewarned: The challenge of the greatest airborne operation of World War II is so immense you may find it becomes not only a part of your life, but of your dreams, as well.

As commander of the British and Allied forces, you won't get shot at in Market Garden, but your boys will. You'll have a mere three days to punch a hole in the German defenses, secure the road through central Holland, and link up with the airborne infantry stuck deep in enemy territory. If you fail to establish this vital supply line, the paratroopers will perish. Speed is essential, but surprise is on your side.

CLICK AND DESTROY

V For Victory fans don't need a lecture on the quality of play in this simulation. If you're not familiar with this series, suffice it to say that you're in charge of all troop movements and ground attacks. You call for air strikes and deploy reinforcements as you labor under limited battlefield intelligence and in all kinds of weather. Retreat is unthinkable, and any troops the Germans isolate will be sausage to the Nazi grinder. Fun, huh?

The familiar aspects of simulated warfare are all represented, but an unusually easy-to-use interface helps cut through the detail, leaving you free to plan the grand strategy. You won't be responsible for man-to-man tactics; you just have to keep the whole operation going.

With over 500 military units to look after, a clean interface is crucial. Quick cycling through the stacks of units makes it easy to issue offensive orders. Individual movement is plotted as fast as you can point to a unit and drag to its destination. To fire a deadly artillery barrage, for instance, all you do is click on a ready unit, then place the cursor atop the target.

As in the real battle of September, 1944, surprise is critical to success in Market Garden. Your first moves determine much of the final outcome. You must rush to meet the forces dropped deep behind enemy lines; dawdle, and they die. You have ample men and material for the job, at least at first. But the shock of the attack lasts only so long, and once the Nazis sniff out your deployment, they'll send all the reinforcements they can muster. If you're still trudging up the road to Arnhem on the second day, you may have already lost. Speed saves the day in Market Garden.

Distinct operation and outcome stages reflect the stress of playing supreme commander. No matter how long you spend creating the perfect battle plan, once the action starts, you're forced to sit back and monitor reports from the battle.

HOLLAND ON AN ARMY A DAY

A large, colorful map of the mission area is included so you can easily get the big picture. The game's two-player mode lets you whip a flesh-and-blood opponent, though you'll be hard pressed to find a real player as able as Market Garden's computerized general. The game's artificial intelligence is top-notch.

If you can't tackle the whole battle, you can play smaller — and shorter — scenarios, but the full campaign's the real challenge.

Unfortunately, Market Garden lacks an overview of the actual operation in its manual, so part of that challenge is in just figuring out your battle plan. You may have rent a tape of the movie *A Bridge Too Far* if you want some background. Maybe the designers thought this daring drop behind the lines was so well-known that they could forget about outlin-

ing the history, but most of us will miss the omission.

That complaint, substantial as it is, is the only flaw in an otherwise first-rate simulation. Operation Market Garden is a gotta-get addition to V for Victory's wargame system. (Although Market Garden stands on its own, it will update some of the features of previous battlesets.)

You'll need clear-headed planning and steel nerves to complete this difficult WWII operation. With luck, you'll own Holland by the third day.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

360 Software, 2105 Bascom Ave., Suite 165, Campbell, CA 95008, (409) 776-2187; IBM PC or compatible (386SX or faster); 3MB RAM; VGA; DOS 5.0 or later; supports AdLib, and SoundBlaster; mouse required; $69.95

JUMP JET

By Mark Reynolds

Let's get one thing straight: Ever since a tour of duty aboard one of MicroProse's boats in Red Storm Rising, I've been a big fan of the company's simulations. For my money, MicroProse does it right, porting amazingly accurate renditions of military hardware to the computer screen, then easing novice captains and pilots into these complex creations using the gentlest learning curve I've encountered. By offering lots of ways to adjust difficulty levels and a manual full of good advice, MicroProse usually lets you walk briskly from beginner to expert.

Now comes Jump Jet, a top-notch flight simulator that straps you in the pilot's seat of the remarkable Harrier fighter. What's so remarkable? Rotating jet nozzles that let you take off and land vertically. Maneuvers you can't do in any other jet, like stopping in mid-air, hovering, even flying backwards!

Unfortunately, you won't have to fly backwards to turn your craft into tiny metal bits. Though MicroProse offers its usual first-class piece of programming in Jump Jet, it's skimped on something nearly as important: advice. If you want to fly this plane, be prepared to spend a lot of time (and Harriers) trying to figure out things that rookie pilots should be told in basic training.

YOUR ATTENTION, PLEASE

Even virtual jet jockeys with plenty of flight time have lots to learn in Jump Jet. At least the manual covers the basics, such as how to read the details of the three different head-up displays (HUDs), and how to take off and land.

You've got to get intimate with the information on the plane's V/STOL (Vertical/Short Take-Off and Land) HUD just to get your craft off the ground and back down again. Among the fine points you'll need to watch are such things as your angle of attack, engine thrust, jet nozzle temperature, side slip, flight path, vertical velocity, and nozzle and flap angles. It's easy enough to get your jet off the ground, but overlook one of your indicators on the way back down, and somebody will be writing KIA next to your name on the roster.

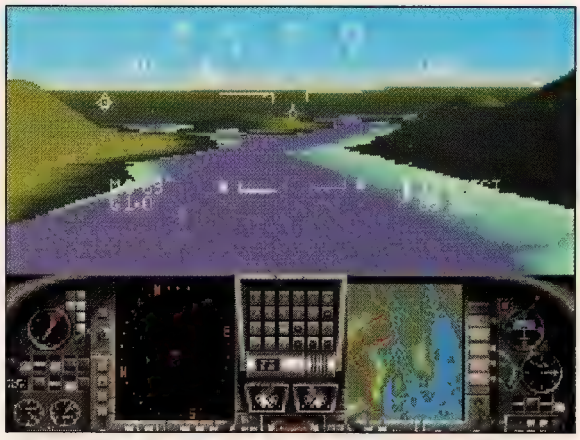
(And there are two more HUDs to learn. If it's finally sinking in that there's a lot to learn as a Harrier pilot, you're doing fine.)

Fortunately, you can adjust any of several options to ease yourself into the complexity a bit at a time. Although choosing between flying for the Royal Air Force or the U.S. Marines doesn't really change anything but a few weapons systems, you can pick from three theaters of war — Hong Kong, the Falklands, and Scandinavia — which increase in difficulty.

You can also set the level of difficulty for six game factors: skill of enemy ground troops, skill of enemy pilots, realism of your weapons, realism of your aircraft, realism of landings, and the type of mission you'll fly (training, single, day, or entire campaign).

If you'd rather skip the mission details and jump right into some hot and heavy action, the simulation's Dogfight mode puts you right into the unfriendly skies — good practice for mastering the difficult techniques of aerial combat. But you'll need lots of practice in other aspects of this aircraft. Landing, free-fall bombing, strafing, and taking recon photos of ground targets are also tough, but you aren't given a chance to single out any of these for practice.

Even in Training mode, the computer assigns you a mission objective (ground attack, photo recon, air intercept, combat air patrol), so you're better off disobeying orders now so you can hone the skills you'll need later on. If HQ instructs you to perform a deep strike against an enemy radar site, just ignore the orders, and take off and land repeatedly until you get the hang of it, or load up as many Rockeye cluster bombs as the plane can carry and drop them on nearby targets. You'll need to have those skills down pat when you play for real. Just make sure you disobey orders only in the game's training mode, where your bad score won't count.



So far, cruising up-river in Jump Jet looks pretty nice. Too bad the documentation doesn't fill you in on survival tactics.

MANUAL LABOR

The world looks nice from the cockpit of a Jump Jet. Your control panel

Continued on page 66.

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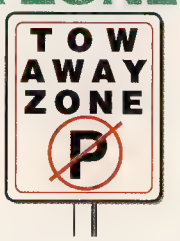

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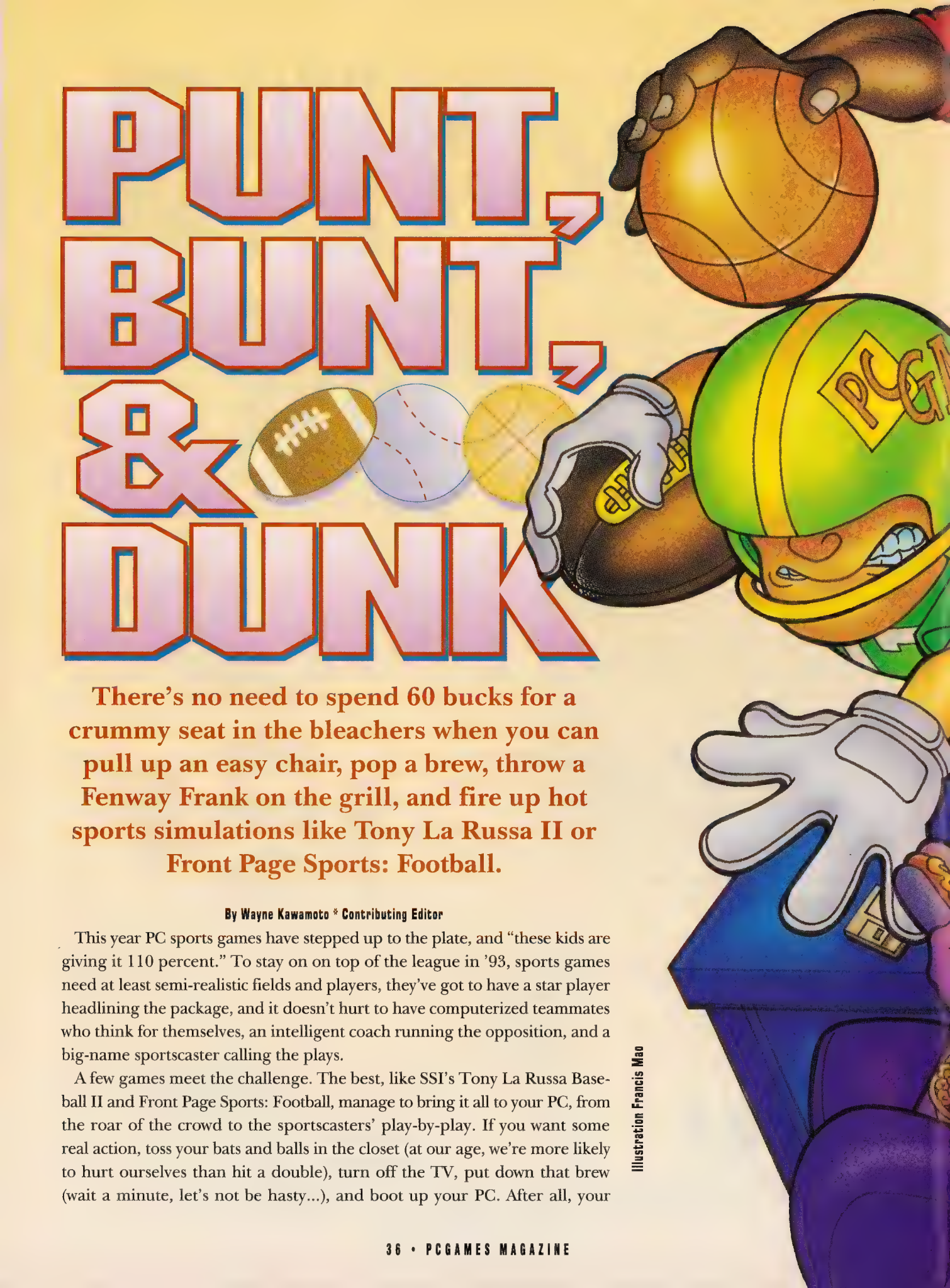

There's no need to spend 60 bucks for a crummy seat in the bleachers when you can pull up an easy chair, pop a brew, throw a Fenway Frank on the grill, and fire up hot sports simulations like Tony La Russa II or Front Page Sports: Football.

By Wayne Kawamoto * Contributing Editor

This year PC sports games have stepped up to the plate, and "these kids are giving it 110 percent." To stay on on top of the league in '93, sports games need at least semi-realistic fields and players, they've got to have a star player headlining the package, and it doesn't hurt to have computerized teammates who think for themselves, an intelligent coach running the opposition, and a big-name sportscaster calling the plays.

A few games meet the challenge. The best, like SSI's Tony La Russa Baseball II and Front Page Sports: Football, manage to bring it all to your PC, from the roar of the crowd to the sportscasters' play-by-play. If you want some real action, toss your bats and balls in the closet (at our age, we're more likely to hurt ourselves than hit a double), turn off the TV, put down that brew (wait a minute, let's not be hasty...), and boot up your PC. After all, your

Illustration Francis Mao

team's matured, you've got that winning spirit, and, frankly, it ain't over 'til it's over.

THE MAN WHO ALWAYS WEARS A HAT

Dallas is home to "America's team," those famous cheerleaders, and Merit Software. Merit's PC sports debut, **Tom Landry Strategy Football**, offers solid gridiron basics. Not only is it one of the easiest football games to learn, but it's also one of the most fun, even though you never control the individual players.

"Strategy" describes Tom Landry Strategy Football to a tee. You set the roster, call the formations and plays, then watch the results. Although it is similar to MicroSport's NFL Pro League Football, Landry features better graphics and a superior interface.

Tom Landry Strategy Football lets you call the formations and plays, then watch the results in a cartoon-like step-through.

Forget what the package says about "arcade-style animation...and all the action of pro football." Landry can't match the action elements of Konami's NFL or Dynamix's Front Page Sports: Football. Instead, you can watch the results of the plays you call only by stepping through a VCR-style replay. But, like Madden's maddening "clicker," you can walk through the play forwards or backwards, even slowing it down for a frame-by-frame examination of every excruciating hit.

If you don't know what formation or play to call next, consult Landry, whose artificially intelligent PC counterpart will suggest a strategy based on the down, field position, and time left on the clock. The program also features a scenario editor, so you can create a situation (field position, time, quarter) to practice with.

This game offers an easy-to-use point-and-shoot interface for setting formations and calling plays. As you make your calls, the program clearly shows you the formation and where your main players will go. This is the hands-down winner when it comes to play depiction; you won't have to refer to playbooks, as in Electronic Arts' John Madden Football II, or look at cryptic cards, as in NFL Pro League Football.

Landry provides seven offensive formations with a variety of plays. You can even send a man in motion. The defense has six formations, which range from 3-4, nickel, and Landry's own 4-3 at the line, to man-on-man, 2-deep zone, and 3-deep zone for the secondary. You can even double up on key offensive players. Don't panic if you're a football novice, however, because Tom Landry Strategy Football provides clear diagrams to make the plays easy to understand.

As the plays execute, the game takes into account weather, penalties, and other variables, and tracks the player and team statistics throughout. The scouting reports are particularly well done.

You can play against the computer or another player, who can either be at your PC or connected over a modem line. With the game's Chat feature, you can even taunt your cross-town opponent during modem play.

Documentation is the only place Landry fumbles. The football terms need explaining, and the manual hands you a paltry five pages of football strategy.

For solid football basics, Tom Landry Strategy Football makes the play. Landry is a perfect PC game for football novices. And, by the time you read this, Landry 2.0 should be on the streets. At press time, Merit was planning to add more formations, the ability to create strong sides, a league editor to create and edit leagues and teams, and more.

FOOTBALL, FRONT AND CENTER

Although it's better known for flight simulators, last year Dynamix had an impressive kickoff into the sports simulation genre with **Front Page Sports: Football**. This all-encompassing simulation features solid football action and strategy and a presentation noted for its excellent graphics and sound effects.

Front Page lets you step into the shoes of a quarterback avoiding the rush, a coach calling the shots, or an owner and general manager running the show from the front office. As quarterback, you carry out plays in arcade-style action. In fact, you can opt for arcade control on both offense and defense. Some of the extras include dives, leaping catches, and tackle-breaking spins. The program also gives you excellent control and flexibility during passes and hand-offs.

Front Page comes with 200 stock plays, and you can create your own with the best football play editor available. You get to tell each player what to do and where to go, define play execution before and after the snap, and even assign logic to the key players to look for passes, block before going out on offense, or focus on specific players. It's easily the most thorough play designer in PC football.

When you own the team you can trade players, sign up free agents, and participate in the college draft.

In Front Page Sports, leagues can last a single season (16 games) or continue year after year. As each season progresses, Front Page compiles

Front Page Sports: Football features the slickest animation and graphics in PC football.

and displays team standings, league schedules, league leaders, injuries, and trades. Dynamix also delivers the fluke football conditions that make real-life sports unpredictable, like wind storms, hail, even too-eager marching bands that begin their half-time show early.

Front Page has the best graphics and animation of any PC football game on the market. Using some 8000 frames of animation, it displays realistic player movement. And the inevitable replays can be viewed from nine different angles.

If you have to settle for one football game to round out your sports library, Front Page Sports: Football should be it. Dynamix really scored with this game. Even a year after its release, it still defines the standard to beat on the PC gridiron.

SERIOUS BASEBALL STATS

With some of the business's most comprehensive statistics, **MicroLeague Baseball IV** emphasizes the manager's game — setting lineups, running the defense, and making the calls. What's more, a unique connection to the U.S. Today Sports on-line network lets you update those incredibly thorough stats weekly.

MicroLeague's playbook editor lets you combine codes into a selection of offensive and defensive plays. By setting the batting and base-running options with these codes, you can tell your players what to do with a single command. On defense, you can set such things as the infield depth and the outfielders' positions.

NOT-QUITE-PRIME-TIME SPORTS

Man does not, and can not, live by baseball and football alone, though potato chips help. There are, indeed, other sports in town.

Getting a leg up on the competition in a new PC genre, MicroLeague will soon introduce **QUARTER POLE**, a thoroughbred racing simulation. In the game you own a stable, hire trainers, and buy and sell horses in a first-person environment that's akin to a role-playing game. The core of Quarter Pole is ten daily races, and some 125 stakes and handicaps through the year. Even if all you know about horses is that they have four legs, you may find this one worth betting on.

Hockey may not get much attention on the PC, but one recent game at least has a high-profile celebrity on its box. In Bethesda's **WAYNE GRETZKY HOCKEY 3**, you control any of your players, or coach from the sidelines. No Ice Capades-style action here, but plenty of slashing, tripping, and high-sticking.

Track and field even gets consideration (usually near the Olympics). Ocean may be a bit late, but its **THE GAMES '92** gives you a taste of everything from track and swimming to boxing and judo. In fact, The Games hands over an astounding 29 individual events. But, like an athlete who's played in one too many sports, The Games is lackluster at best. In typical Olympic arcade action, you'll be pounding the keyboard or pushing the mouse until they smoke as you try to coordinate an athlete's motions. The Games '92 is certainly not going for the gold. — WK

MicroLeague's Quarter Pole puts horseflesh inside your PC, and your bets on the digital line.

PRODUCT INFORMATION

The Games '92
Ocean of America
1855 O'Toole Ave., Suite D-102
San Jose, CA 95131
(408) 954-0201
$39.95

Quarter Pole
MicroLeague Sports
2201 Drummond Plaza
Newark, DE 19711
(302) 368-9990
$49.95

Wayne Gretzky Hockey 3
Bethesda Softworks
1370 Piccard Dr.
Rockville, MD 20850
(301) 926-8300
$59.95

As you'd expect, the game tracks league standings and player statistics. It then compares those stats to a player's true historical performance. If you're serious about your stats, you can connect to the U.S. Today Sports Network with a modem and download revised player stats each week, so your virtual players will more closely reflect the real-life pros. When you need information, the stat notebook gives you all the relevant numbers on the batter, the pitcher, and the outfielders. The game also considers stadium and seasonal factors.

For all its managerial talent, MicroLeague Baseball IV falls far short when it comes to on-screen action. It puts tiny players on the field, and when someone hits the ball it simply shows a generic ballplayer — in black and white no less. At least it's over with quickly.

Baseball IV also offers a slew of add-ons, from the GM/Owner Disk, which lets you create and edit teams and trade players, to various season and team disks. An enhanced version of MicroLeague Baseball IV will also be available on CD-ROM in the near future — perhaps even by the time you read this.

In all, MicroLeague Baseball IV is a satisfying sequel to a long line of first-rate baseball games. If you're into baseball statistics, this simulation's almost impossible to beat.

MicroLeague Baseball IV features pop-up windows to show the action.

PC FIELD OF DREAMS

A much more satisfying PC baseball game is SSI's **Tony La Russa Baseball II**, the sequel to last year's Ultimate Baseball. Like MicroLeague Baseball IV, Tony II works from a solid statistical foundation. But, unlike Baseball IV, this title adds excellent arcade action to the mix. The final score? Tony II is the best baseball yet to hit the PC field.

Back, back, back to the warning track! Tony La Russa Baseball II's fielding is elegant; just put your fielder inside the shrinking circle.

Tony II traded last year's 16-color display for one that shows 256 colors. The graphics are great throughout, particularly when the game's close-up camera views appear.

Like Accolade's Hardball III, La Russa adds play-by-play commentary. Nationally syndicated announcer Ron Barr calls it as he sees it, even adding colorful comments ("It's a towering home run!"). Of course, you'll need an audio card to hear Barr bark.

Bundled with this game are 54 old-timer teams and 11 classic stadiums, though you can create your own teams and leagues if you want. Major League Baseball Players Association-licensed expansion disks can add some 1000 active pro players and all the major league ballparks, while a Fantasy Draft Expansion Disk provides a full-featured draft utility.

Tony II is packed. You do everything from setting the batting order and pitching rotation to calling for pinch hitters and runners. You can play exhibition games or entire seasons. In fact, Tony II can play an entire 162-game season in less than 20 minutes. During such a fast run, it lets you play, manage, or watch any of the games, and a digitized version of La Russa can find time for a quick consultation.

The action's top-notch in Tony II, and it's especially striking during fielding. When the ball's hit, a circle shows you where it will land. As it comes down, the circle gets smaller, indicating where your player must stand to make the catch. All in all, it's an excellent way to handle three-dimensional distances on what's really a two-dimensional screen.

Tony II doesn't forget the numbers either. Along with the usual stats, it rates each player for speed, power, morale, and other factors. La Russa also rates players on how they perform in night versus daytime games. Streak ratings, a hallmark of this game's predecessor, predict seasonal variations in a player's performance. In Tony II, Reggie Jackson actually plays like the Mr. October he was in reality.

Tony II covers all of the bases with comprehensive stats, attractive graphics, and terrific action.

FLYING WITH MICHAEL

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Michael Jordan In Flight takes PC roundball to new heights with digitized court-level action, good teamwork, and Jordan himself.

some excellent three-on-three without working up a sweat when you boot up Electronic Arts' **Michael Jordan In Flight**. In Flight combines court-level action and snappy graphics with some intelligent teamwork to recreate the flavor, if not the feel, of NBA action. No other PC basketball games comes close to In Flight's prowess.

To create characters that move and shoot more realistically, EA videotaped Jordan and the other players, then digitized those images onto the game's filled-polygon court. The result is fierce action from the player's perspective.

You watch the action as if you were running right behind Jordan himself. Like a flight simulator, In Flight's court perspective and player images change depending on the direction you're facing.

The controls, whether mouse- or joystick-driven, are simple. On offense, one button shoots the ball, the other passes the ball or requests a pass (it depends, obviously, on whether Mike has the ball or not). On defense, the same buttons attempt a steal, or jump for the block or rebound. To dribble, just choose a direction and move the mouse or shove the joystick.

Jordan's three-on-three game is a good compromise that lets you grandstand as Jordan himself, but still allows teamwork. You can run four simple plays, and your electronic teammates not only set up the play and mix it up with the opposition, but they'll even improvise when necessary.

Like any decent sports game, In Flight includes a replay camera to review the past basket from inbounds to bucket. Here you can change the camera angles, and edit your finest moments to later show off to your friends.

In real basketball, no one gets the best of Jordan (except maybe Bugs Bunny in those Nike commercials), and no program, for now, tops Michael Jordan In Flight for PC hoops.

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Michael Jordan In Flight
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MicroLeague Baseball IV
MicroLeague Sports
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Tom Landry Strategy Football
Merit Software
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Tony La Russa Baseball II
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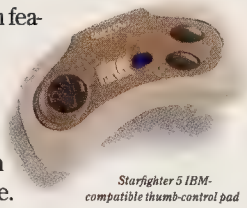

Starfighter 5 IBM-compatible thumb-control pad

And Starfighter 5 is the same neutral color as your computer casing—so you can keep it next to your PC and it won't stick out like a sore thumb.

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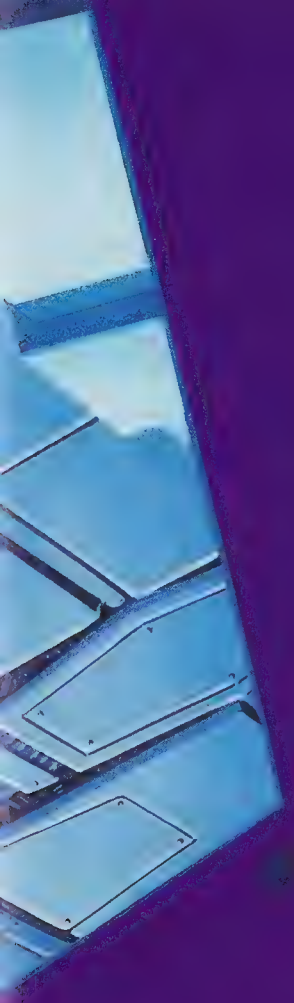


Lost in Space

By Peter Olafson

When outer space meets floppy disk, the tales get weird, and sometimes wonderful.

It was a lonely place. The sort of place where silence becomes tangible, a stocking-smooth face peering out from between the trees in the deep woods, a crackling step behind you on the dark path, an electric pulse that pushes you home to the bright kitchen window.

It was an island off the coast of Maine, a summer house in '65. No comic books. No Beatles 45s. No baseball cards. Just me and my big fat 9-year-old imagination. It was there at night, in a country darkness deeper than black; it was there in the day, in the dead eyes of empty summer homes and the half-lit primeval wilderness of overturned tree stumps.

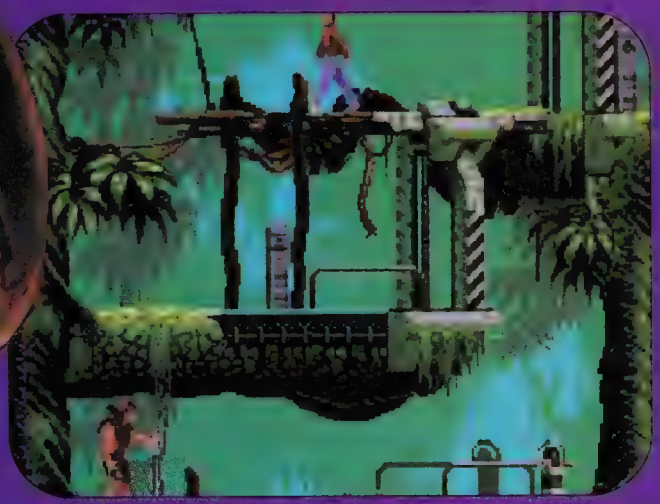
The house, like all rented New England summer homes, had a library of local histories and forgotten pre-War novels. But upstairs, crushed behind a dresser and fluffy from bouts with the salty air and too-hot radiators, was a collection of short stories — science fiction stories. The book was a little too old for me, and, with a consuming sense of looking in my parents' dresser drawers, I devoured it.

I don't remember the name of the book, but I do remember one of its stories. It was Philip K. Dick's "The Second Variety," an account of a future war fought largely by sophisticated robots. The Second Variety was a machine the hero couldn't tell from a human — until it was too late.

Illustration Patrick Ho

Looking back from the boat the day we left, the house seemed bathed in a halo whiter than white. It was only the sun breaking through the clouds, but fueled by tales from that secret book, my 9-year-old imagination had other ideas.

As you look at these five science fiction and space adventure games, look at them with the free imagination of a nine year old — with fantasy, tense apprehension, and magnetic curiosity. Like the stories in that book, a few of these games are surprising, in ways both fascinating and frightening.



Rotoscoped animation and hand-drawn backgrounds launch Flashback "out of this world."

THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN

The best of the group is SSI's **Flashback.** It's really from Delphine, the French label that designed Interplay's splendid action-adventure Out of This World (OTW) last year. Interplay must be kicking itself; Flashback is a great game.

A different game, too. Flashback isn't exactly an OTW sequel in either story or style, though it would be easy enough to pretend it is. Like its predecessor, Flashback is an arcade-adventure, but the polygon creations of OTW have been replaced by rotoscoped actors. (That's a mildly controversial cinematic technique in which live-action footage is traced to look like animation. Hence, the characters' truly fluid movement — not just lifelike, but almost living.) Its backgrounds are hand drawn. Moreover, the whole thing has been miniaturized; what would have occupied three screens in OTW now appears in just one.

Your character, scientist-athlete Conrad B. Hart, wakes up in the jungle, his memory missing. He may be only an inch tall, but he's incredibly real nevertheless. The impact from a rifle hit flings him backward with the sort of sudden violence one typically sees only in those eyewitness videos. When he comes to a halt at a precipice (and there are lots of precipices in this game!) he flings out his arms and bends his knees in braking. You couldn't do better in real life. Conrad does a great cop imitation when he draws his gun and goes into a crouch, and he takes great, flailing long jumps. OTW's animation was roundly compared to Prince of Persia. Flashback surpasses it. Easily.

Delphine has also answered the criticisms of Out of This World.

Flashback is not small; there are seven extensive and increasingly menacing worlds to explore. And it's not easy. There are three levels of difficulty, which seem mainly to determine how many gunmen and robots populate the landscape. But even the easiest level will stymie you. Level Two, for instance, begins with one of those infuriatingly limited environments — an elevator leading down to nowhere and a ledge beguilingly out of reach.

However, Flashback's not perfect. Inevitably so, in some ways, for it's bound to suffer by comparison to OTW. Playing OTW was like being witness to the birth of a new genre, and that feeling just isn't here. By shrinking the the character sprite, Flashback becomes less intimate, less immediate, less in-your-pocket. It's now another platform game — albeit a wonderful platform game for a machine with few good ones.

And, though they may add to the cinematic flavor of the game, the cutscene animations that pop up at various points through the game become distracting and should vanish at your whim.

But none of these complaints are Earth-shattering. Playing Flashback is a pure, symbiotic experience — one of those rare games that connects your nerve endings straight to another life, not just the keyboard.

Don't pass up this one.

AN ALIEN BY ANY OTHER NAME

Electronic Arts' **Space Hulk** is just as good, though it takes a little longer to get there.

You're in charge of one or two five-trooper squads marauding through giant derelict spacecraft (the hulks) to retrieve items and wipe out infestations of the parasitic gene stealers.

Protostar has you wandering the galaxy, begging for help to fight the Skeetch. At least the displays are nice.

At first, it's rather like playing a 3-D board game — especially on the planning screen, where you plot simultaneous moves — and not without reason, since Space Hulk is based on a celebrated board wargame. Movement is a hybrid of Wolfenstein's 3-D scroll and Bard's Tale's square-by-square. That is, it's basically one square at a time, but the screen scrolls between squares, and if you keep the direction arrow pressed, it feels like you're scrolling right along.

You see through the eyes of all five troopers all the time: The views from the four inactive troopers are arrayed across the top of the screen, but you control only one at a time.

You'll like Space Hulk's straightforwardness, its unpretentious ambition. While it's full of amenities like digitized speech and pretty pictures, it has an efficient design, uncluttered by inventory or status screens.

You'll need some nerve for this game, though, because Space Hulk sneaks up on you as quickly as the aliens, who have a nasty habit of popping out of the walls in ambush. One night I was about to put aside the game, but I decided to go on one more mission. It was easy. I picked up the required item, destroyed an alien statue, and was heading for the exit when I heard a distant screech of rage — great screams! — then the not-so-distant slamming of doors. My motion detector beeped wildly as a plague of red circles surged toward me. I backed into the statue's niche to have it out. I died in the ensuing melee, but I took 18 of the bastards with me.

In a surprisingly short time, Space Hulk feels utterly un-board game-like and much more like being alone in the air ducts of Sigourney Weaver's Nostromo. The corridors sizzle with disconnected electric wires, jets of steam, and revolving red lights. (Sound familiar?) Even the *aliens* look a bit like you-know-what.

You don't need to worry about the learning curve. The tutorial missions take care of that. And you don't have any time to sulk over the deaths of your fellows, because the aliens are coming after you next.

Even this game's problems aren't really worth worrying about. First, there's no real hand-to-combat, just Legends of Valour-style bloody blotches once the aliens close with you. And, while the sound effects are

Guess who? That thing looks vaguely familiar, doesn't it? Even so, Space Hulk's a blast.

terrific, there's a lot of growling going on even when no alien's in sight.

And if those are the biggest complaints, what are we complaining about? Give Space Hulk a little time, and you'll be giving it all your time.

SEND HELP

Likewise, you'll be pleasantly surprised by Tsunami's **Protostar.** Unlike the label's Ringworld (reviewed elsewhere in this issue), this role-playing game starts from a meaty premise: a sort of galactic version of the "Dear Pop, Send money. STOP" telegram.

Okay, you're flying the doorstop-looking ship, and there's these red balls flyin' at you. What's this all about? Just part of a 17MB graphic demo, that's what.

Rather than crying for Dad, though, you're trying to convince aliens to join the Human Alliance's cause in the Thule sector. (We can't fight the Skeetch all by ourselves, you know.)

To pull this off without blowing your cover, you'll steer your Newfront ship to many a planet, chatting up the locals (an enjoyable art), collecting ore, and visiting the handful of space stations to install new equipment, fill up on fuel, call your boss, and maybe get into the occasional firefight (these are dangerous times).

In looks, Protostar brings to mind Rise of the Dragon and Willie Beamish: austere, handsome, and just a touch faded. In structure, it's a more terse, less goofy Starflight. This isn't cutting-edge stuff for 1993 — you'll wish there was more to do from time to time — but it's fun.

Your biggest problem will probably be getting started. It's easy to feel lost at first, because there's not much of a trail to follow. (On the other hand, that's more realistic than being led around by the nose.) What's more, the icon-based controls don't quite click; the icons don't really look like what they do. Steering the ship isn't exactly intuitive. (I found myself going in loops a lot.) Fortunately, there's online help.

Still, these problems didn't keep me from enjoying myself, and as I saved the game and left its universe, I had the sense that there were other small surprises waiting in Protostar.

SPACED-OUT DEMO

You can't make that claim for **Inca** — a 10-disk graphics demo made by France's Coktel Vision and distributed here by Sierra...

Sorry, what's that? You say it's not a graphics demo? You say it's a game? Boy, is my face red!

But maybe Coktel Vision should be blushing, too, because, while Inca's absolutely gorgeous, and even fun in spots, I can't recall a game this large that offered less play value. (Inca weighs in at 17 megabytes on the hard disk.) It's not that the game is awful; it's just insubstantial and uneven.

Inca's the sort of game that Cinemaware used to do so well: a series of stylish arcade and puzzle games strung together as an adventure. You play the legendary Eldorado — a golden creature with living eyes — and you've been charged to restore the Incan empire by finding three jewels. If only life were this easy.

Evidently, there's something to those stories about Incas and ancient spacecraft. In the opening sequence, you have to fly a sort of golden doorstop (called a Tumi) toward a planet. As you close in, giant red balls appear *en masse*. When you shoot them, they appear to turn into snowballs and then disappear. If they hit you, they knock you off course. It's a sort of Asteroids without the shrapnel. Alert the media.

When you reach the planet, you descend into a metallic trough in the manner of Luke Skywalker attacking the Death Star, and have to beat the enemy ships to the end. However, I don't recall old Luke periodically slowing down or swaying back and forth the way Inca does. Wing Commander and X-Wing have nothing to fear.

Then you're into the game's forte, a series of oddly agreeable puzzle games built around object manipulation. It's basically a matter of experimentation, as some of the puzzles are logical and some are not. The maze that follows, where you fight 17th-century-ish guys who look as though they'd stepped right out of a TV set, is actually fun.

Graphically, this is all beautifully done. It's little wonder that Inca won an award in Europe for its handsome face. But as far as game play goes...well, let's just say it's very nice graphically and leave it at that, eh?

Inca may show off your PC's graphic qualities — that's the job of an in-store demo, isn't it? — but it sure isn't entertainment.

BLAST 'EM, DANO

Finally, there's **Laser Squad** from MicroLeague Interactive Software, a game that's both something new and something old. This game of futuristic tactical combat, released under agreement with England's Krisalis Software, was originally put out by MicroIllusions in 1989. It's essentially an upgrade of that Breach-like game: arm your troops, place 'em, and tell 'em how to do their duty.

There's lots to like at lots of levels.

the HUMANS™

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Head shots and elaborate intros give Laser Squad a sense of presence.

At the top, Laser Squad looks lovely in 256 colors and is easy to control with the mouse. It's nice to have the large head shots of the members of your outfit so they're not just faceless goons in headgear. And, an elaborate intro for each mission sets the scene far better than a simple text passage.

The missions are more customized than one might expect for a game of this sort. Laser Squad also leaves behind the odd, traditional mix of side view for the troops and angled-down view for the scenery — they're both angled down here — and a good deal of thought has gone into the game's combat engine. Grenades travel only as far as a given character is capable of throwing them, and troopers can level three distinctive types of gunfire: aimed, snapshot, or burst. There's opportunity fire, and you're able to prime grenades to determine when they'll go off.

This kind of detail has much in common with tactical board games like Avalon Hill's Panzer Leader and Panzer Blitz, and on the computer, it's all extremely fluid and easy-going. There's nothing bookish about this game.

Then again, the 1993 version of Laser Squad has exactly the same problem the 1989 one did. Nice game, it's just short — short on missions and short on personality. Five missions, however nicely laid-out, are still peanuts for this sort of game. It should have a dozen, minimum, and a mission builder, too. Like Breach, this one is also a tad short on personality. In short, you move, you shoot, you collect objects.

Perhaps we're out of line expecting personality in a wargame, but there is another game in this same school that has it. Tegel's Mercenaries (from Mindcraft), despite its unpredictable controls and general on-screen chaos, offers up a weird sense of presence.

That sort of presence — the flailing arms at the precipice, the anguished screams of awakened aliens, and that imagined thing in the deep woods of Maine — belongs to The Second Variety. Some science fiction games got it, some don't. Some are just digital androids trying to pass themselves off as games. A few are as real as entertainment on the PC gets. ❑

product information

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System requirements: 286-20 or faster machine (386 recommended) with 640K RAM, hard disk, joystick recommended. Operating Sys.: MS DOS 5.0 or above, Windows 3.1. Graphics compatible with VGA. Sound support: Sound Blaster, Sound Blaster Pro, Thunder Board, Pro Audio Spectrum, Adlib Gold and Speed Master.

R This game is not for the faint-hearted. Contains violence and some material inappropriate for minors under 18.

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Illustration Cory Vaalchall

PUMP UP THE VOLUME!

By Bernie Yee

A new band of sound boards blasts the sound-intensive games of '93.

Games sans sound? No virtual reality there. Silent games are about as entertaining as the Red Hot Chili Peppers unplugged. Whether it's the electronic noise of an X-Wing cockpit or the hoary sound of creaking doors in Crusaders of the Dark Savant, audio is as important to the experience as flashy graphics.

Chalk one up for games — they pushed sound down the PC's throat, and in effect defined the sound market. Even mighty Microsoft has given in and included a SoundBlaster driver with its new sound card, and they're courting game developers like Sierra to provide direct support. Even with all the attention paid to multimedia in business, the real business of multimedia is entertainment. (See, games are good for something.)

HEAR ME ROAR

In the early days of audio, AdLib was king. But in a coup that overturned the status quo, Creative Labs' SoundBlaster provided an AdLib-compatible board that upped the ante, offering features like digitized speech. Still the standard, SoundBlaster runs the show, at least in support. If a new card isn't compatible with SoundBlaster sound, speech, and music, its gaming applications are limited. Unfortunately, though all SoundBlaster-compatible cards are touted as equal, some are less equal than others.

Today's sound cards are alike in other ways as well. Most operate on a principle called frequency modulation (or FM) synthesis to create music. (Some more sophisticated cards, like the Roland Sound Canvas, use MIDI wave tables — digitized samples of actual instruments — to generate music.) Most boards come equipped with a CD-ROM interface, a high-speed joystick port, a small built-in amplifier, volume control, and microphone input. And all boards are bundled with a variety of DOS and/or Windows-based software that lets you mix and play various sound files.

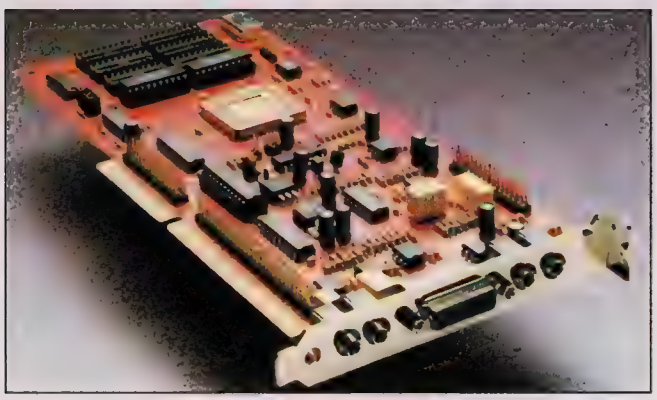
We last looked at audio in the February issue of *PCGames* ("Now Hear This!"), but since then, the sound card choices have mushroomed. We'll take a listening tour through four new entries: Creative Labs' SoundBlaster 16 ASP, Logitech's SoundMan 16, Advanced Gravis' UltraSound, and Aztech Labs' Sound Galaxy 16. All but the UltraSound are based on the OPL-3 FM synthesis chip, the standard today for low-cost music synthesis. We put them through their paces by flying Origin's behemoth Strike Commander and LucasArts' addicting X-Wing, games that rely heavily on digitized speech, music, and sound effects.

Let's crank up the volume and hear what happens.

SOUNDBLASTER 16 ASP/WAVEBLASTER

Creative Labs may piece together its sound boards in Singapore, but the SoundBlaster is more than just a mainstay in the U.S. PC-peripheral industry. It still calls most of the shots when it comes to audio.

Its newest card, the SoundBlaster 16 ASP, maintains that leadership role. The combination of the $349 SoundBlaster 16 and the $249 WaveBlaster may be an expensive package deal, but frankly, the two together produce the best sound of any of the four boards.



SoundBlaster 16

The most sophisticated sound card currently available with wave table and FM synthesis music; greatly improved installation over previous SoundBlaster Pro; most software support; microphone for voice input included.

Essentially, the SoundBlaster 16 ASP is a 16-bit version of the company's older SoundBlaster Pro, though it adds an Advanced Signal Processor (ASP) chip to improve music and sound sampling. While the ASP chip gives the SoundBlaster 16 unmatched sampling and playback capabilities (and potentially much more in the future), the feature actually has little impact on either games or game players. (In fact, it's possible that Creative Labs may release a SoundBlaster 16 with a open ASP socket and lower the price of the card, while allowing for future upgrades.)

The SoundBlaster 16 is based on the Yamaha OPL-3 chip. Thus, its FM synthesized music — the standard 20-voice, four-operator music found in the SoundMan 16 and Sound Galaxy 16 — is virtually indistinguishable from those cards, or even the SoundBlaster Pro. But, because the SoundBlaster 16 is much easier to install than its predecessors — you can now set all the IRQ and DMA settings via software control without cracking open the PC to manually change jumpers on the card — it's a better choice for most game players.

The separate WaveBlaster, a daughterboard that clips right onto the SoundBlaster 16, provides its own MIDI processor, interpreter, and wave table. Music that directly supports the WaveBlaster, or that supports the General MIDI standard (different from Roland compatibility), isn't synthesized by the computer through the lower-quality FM synthesis, but is actually played from digitized samples of various instruments.

Though rumors persist that the combination's MIDI implementation isn't perfect, that there are problems with some special effects (stereo panning, for one), and that SoundBlaster Pro compatibility in earlier titles is iffy, the only quirk uncovered during testing was that the WaveBlaster daughterboard wouldn't function properly with the joystick port enabled. Notwithstanding this complaint, the card combination plays X-Wing's riveting soundtrack superbly. Listening to the Star Wars soundtrack blaring with real-sounding instruments is one of the most enjoyable computer experiences to date. Ditto with Strike Commander, which the board easily handled; a slew of older games running under SoundBlaster or SoundBlaster Pro emulation ran without problems, too. Digitized speech, however, sounded somewhat noisier than the SoundMan 16.

The SoundBlaster 16 is the big-name sound card of choice for expandability into the future of wave table technology. Coupled with the fact that Creative Labs' products typically garner a lion's share of game developer support, it makes the SoundBlaster 16 a no-lose proposition.

ULTRASOUND

The most enigmatic entry here, Gravis' $199 UltraSound, may have a host of features, but it's hobbled by incomplete hardware.

The UltraSound differs from the other boards in that it's not an FM synthesis board, but a wave table board. That should provide much more realistic music. Digitized MIDI samples played through UltraSound are excellent. UltraSound comes with a version of Electronic Arts' smooth-flying simulator Chuck Yeager's Air Combat, which supports the UltraSound directly. As you'd expect, the music sounded noticeably better than any FM board could produce.

UltraSound

Wave table board generates better music than any OPL-3 sound card; reliance on software driver for SoundBlaster compatibility and lack of General MIDI compliance potentially troublesome; excellent technical support.

UltraSound achieves the mandatory SoundBlaster compatibility through a software driver, which raises some possible compatibility problems. X-Wing ran under UltraSound's SoundBlaster emulation mode (as did Strike Commander), but reports from other users have been less successful. Indeed, with memory-hungry games the norm,

any driver that robs you of valuable RAM may be suspect.

Installation is not nearly as simple as with the SoundMan 16 or even the SoundBlaster 16 ASP. UltraSound makes you manually set the various IRQ and DMA settings on the board by switching jumpers. And, though the manual has a chart of settings for these jumpers, it's still more than a little confusing for gamers who don't want to open up their PC in the first place. Most newer cards let you change these settings via software, a far more preferable technique.

More distressing is that though UltraSound claims to be a General MIDI board, it in fact lacks a MIDI interpreter. The result is that the UltraSound is sadly quiet under X-Wing's General MIDI music setting.

What's more, its digital samples are not stored in ROM, but instead are loaded into the card's 256K of RAM (expandable to 1 MB RAM), which requires a form of caching to load the most-used samples into memory and then swap them with samples on your hard drive when necessary. This sample-filled support directory takes up around seven megabytes of hard drive space.

In the end, the UltraSound falls into a Catch-22; it sounds great with native support, but without providing reliable SoundBlaster compatibility. Unless you're sure that your favorite games (and game developers) are going to back the UltraSound, you should be wary of this card.

SOUND GALAXY NX PRO 16

The feature-packed Sound Galaxy NX PRO 16 is a fascinating soldier in the sound wars. Like Creative Labs, Aztech Labs is a Singapore-based hardware company that's decided to test the U.S. sound card market. And despite the low-budget name of the board and its amateurish advertising, the $269 Sound Galaxy 16 is an excellent value for experienced PC gamers who are looking for an inexpensive sound card with excellent expansion potential.

The Sound Galaxy 16 boasts that it's compatible with more standards than any other card, including Disney Sound Source, Covox Speech Thing, and Microsoft Sound System sounds. Of course, it also emulates the SoundBlaster. X-Wing and Strike Commander sounded as they should when run through this card.

The Sound Galaxy 16's FM synthesis is based on the OPL-3 chip, which makes the music sonically identical to its FM-synthesis competition, the SoundBlaster 16 ASP and the SoundMan 16.

And, like that pair of boards, the Sound Galaxy lets you select interrupts and DMA channels via software for easy installation. It improves slightly on its competition, though, for it can enable and disable the game port via software too.

Amazingly, the Sound Galaxy 16 has greater expandability potential than any card in this review. Not only does it come with a Mitsumi/Panasonic CD-ROM interface, but an optional add-on converts the card to a standard SCSI interface, letting you connect any number of CD-ROM drives to the card. And, an SG Adaptor provides compatibility with the widely-available Sony CD-ROM drives. SoundBlaster users have to wait for a double-speed Panasonic CD-ROM drive to hit the street, but Sound Galaxy owners can plug in a Sony or NEC double-speed drive today. Aztech also plans to release a wave table daughterboard similar to Creative Labs' WaveBlaster.

Sound Galaxy

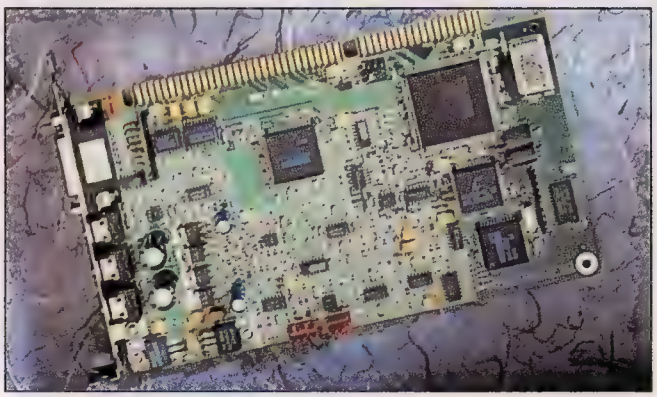
Low-cost, SoundBlaster-compatible board; headphones and NX PRO 16 microphone included; easy installation; newcomer to sound market.

If you're looking for a low-cost, but still flexible sound system, the Sound Galaxy 16 is an excellent choice.

SOUNDMAN 16

Logitech's $289 SoundMan 16 is functionally identical to the MediaVision ProAudio Spectrum 16, an older card considered to be one of the best all-around audio cards for the money. This connection is important, because the ProAudio Spectrum is a widely-supported sound card, with numerous game titles providing native support.

Like its MediaVision cousin, the SoundMan is based on the Yamaha OPL-3 chip and the MediaVision chipset. Sound quality of the SoundMan 16 is nearly identical to other FM synthesis boards — not surprising, since many



SoundMan 16

Simple software-driven installation routine; excellent technical support; excellent digitized sound playback; confidence-inspiring backing of Logitech, but a "bare-bones" 16-bit card.

FEATURES

CARD	JOYSTICK	CD-ROM INTERFACE	SCSI PORT	AMPLIFIER	SAMPLING RATE	MUSIC SYNTHESIS
Sound Blaster 16 ASP	Y	Y	N	4 watts	44.1 KHz	OPL-3; wave table option available
UltraSound	Y	N	Optional	2 watts	44.1 KHz	wave table; software driver required for SoundBlaster compatibility
Sound Galaxy NX PRO 16	Y	Y	N	4 watts	44.1 KHz	OPL-3; wave table option forthcoming
SoundMan 16	Y	N	N	4 watts	44.1 KHz	OPL-3 20-voice FM

other boards, including the ProAudio Spectrum 16 and SoundBlaster Pro, use the same chip. Oddly, the digitized speech in Strike Commander and X-Wing seemed to come through more clearly here than with any other card.

The SoundMan 16 is no clone of the ProAudio Spectrum 16, though; it lacks the SCSI interface that the latter has on board. You can't connect a CD-ROM to your computer without another SCSI interface card. If you already have a CD-ROM drive and card, or don't plan on buying into this storage format, it's not a problem. If you're thinking of upgrading your PC to include CD-ROM in the near future, however, steer clear. (The Soundman 16 does have CD-ROM audio input, so audio from a CD-ROM can run through your Soundman.)

Of the cards included here, the Soundman 16 is the easiest to install. Simple software-controlled hardware settings and straightforward documentation are coupled with Logitech's excellent seven-day-a-week technical support. Like the Sound Galaxy 16, the SoundMan 16 lets you set DMA channels and IRQ interrupts, and enable and disable the joystick port via software settings.

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AMAZON is designed in the style of the serials of the 1940's and 50's such as Flash Gordon, The Lost City, and Rocketman.

These serials were made up of intriguing, fast paced episodes which placed the hero in unbelievable peril. AMAZON contains 14 exciting episodes filled with plot twists, mysterious characters and heart stopping cliff-hangers. You haven't had this much fun since the drive-in days!

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If this card had the potential for a wave table add-on card and a CD-ROM interface, it would clearly be the pick of the litter. As it stands, though, the SoundMan 16 is an excellent choice only if you don't plan on expansion down the road.

PLAYING THE BOTTOM LINE

To game players, this newest wave of sound cards is a bit overwhelming, and somewhat deceptive. For those of us simply interested in getting the best music we can out of our computers, the 8-bit/16-bit distinction doesn't mean much. In terms of music and sound effects quality, 16-bit cards like the SoundMan 16 and the Sound Galaxy 16 are very similar to the FM synthesis on more primitive 8-bit cards, such as the original SoundBlaster Pro or even MediaVision's ThunderBoard. The difference really comes into play only for those who use their sound cards to sample and record sound.

Still, the cost of 16-bit boards has come down far enough so that gamers don't have to forego these products' extra features, like a CD-ROM interface and the ability to sample music at 44 KHz. And there's no denying that the newer cards are typically easier to install.

The real improvement for gamers lies in the combination of MIDI and wave table technology. Two cards here, the SoundBlaster 16 and the UltraSound, can already use digitized music samples to provide immensely better musical quality, while the Sound Galaxy 16 promises a wave table add-on board in the near future. The difference in sound quality is so phenomenal that it's likely wave table boards will replace the current FM cards.

The future sounds pretty bright for PC games. ❑

PRODUCT INFORMATION

SoundBlaster 16 ASP
Creative Labs
1901 McCarthy Blvd.
Milpitas, California 95035
(408) 428-6600
$349; WaveBlaster, $249

SoundMan 16
Logitech, Inc.
6505 Kaiser Dr.
Fremont, California 94555
(510) 795-8500
$289

Sound Galaxy NX PRO 16
Aztech Labs
46707 Fremont Blvd.
Fremont, California 94538
(510) 623-8988
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By Wayne Kawamoto

SIM STORM

There's one thing that a simulation of Desert Storm can offer: the satisfaction of taking a battle to a decisive conclusion.

They said it was going to be the mother of all battles, but it turned out to be more like the nephew of all battles. With all due respect to Stormin' Norman, running the Coalition forces in an historically accurate simulation of Desert Storm is hardly a tough job.

Yet, Desert Storm war games "challenge" you to "control the U.S.-led forces in action and strategy straight from the Persian Gulf" as you're "confronted with the same brutal strategic decisions General Norman Schwarzkopf faced."

When you get right down to it, though, once the Iraqi communications are knocked out in the initial air attack, where's the challenge? Is the challenge trying to house the enemy, who's surrendering in droves? And still game makers continue to offer new strategy games based on the Persian Gulf Crisis.

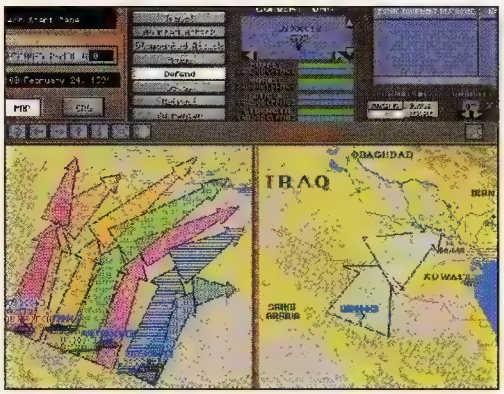
What If Hussein Had...?

Computers can offer something to these re-creations: They let you ask "What if?" SSI's **Line in the Sand**, for instance, accurately re-creates Operation Desert Storm, but also offers new diplomatic scenarios: What if Iran had taken revenge against Iraq? What if a holy war had erupted? What if Israel had been surrounded? Each scenario has its own set of objectives, which may not be achievable through military might.

And, though Line in the Sand is a rather conventional board-type computer war game, up to five players can join the fray, each controlling a different country and fighting to accomplish different objectives. You could play with a friend, and both win in the end. (A winnable war? Now that is novel!)

Three-Sixty's **Patriot** lets you command the Desert Storm's Coalition forces (some 2000 units) and mix it up with the Republican Guard. In this simulation, Three-Sixty introduces a new gaming engine that features accurate terrain, a realistic military chain of command, and detailed control over each unit's posture, formation, position, and supplies. Patriot also breaks new ground by eschewing the conventional board grid — you're free to place your forces anywhere on the map. You can also take control of the Iraqi forces, and, according to the game's writers, you can win when you're on Saddam's side — although it's something like putting a camel through the eye of the proverbial needle.

Patriot historically mimics Desert Storm's time scale, and accurately rates both sides for air strength, morale, fatigue, and equipment. But by altering these ratings, you can set up different scenarios for different challenges: What if Iraq had had more strength in the air? What if the communications hadn't been taken out? On the PC, the possibilities are endless.



Three-Sixty's Patriot may let you reinvent Desert Storm, but its interface is a mess.

Despite Patriot's innovations, though, learning and playing this war simulation is fruitless. In fact, the game itself is a casualty. Forget about holding the Iraqis at bay; the challenge is figuring out the interface. At press time, Three-Sixty was working on an upgrade designed to fix some of these problems.

One War to Wage

Probably the biggest reason for the popularity of Gulf games is that Desert Storm is timely, and association with recent history sells games. During the conflict itself, MicroProse and Spectrum Holobyte saw their sales of flight simulators take off. This even prompted MicroProse to offer a special Persian Gulf mission disk with Strike Eagle II. Desert Storm also unleashed an optimistic and patriotic mood across the country, which also boosts war game sales.

When you think about it, how many of today's PC gamers (who according to statistics are, on average, younger than 30) can vividly remember the Vietnam War? Go back to the Korean Conflict or World War II, and you're talking about ancient history — and a mere handful of PC players. Like it or not, Desert Storm is the only war we've got. Of course, there's one thing that a simulation of Desert Storm *can* offer: the satisfaction of taking a battle to an ultimate and decisive conclusion. That's something we can do only on the PC. ❑

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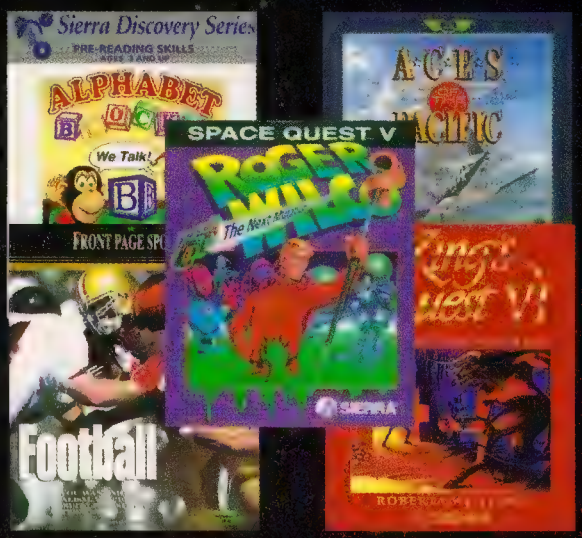

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By Barry Brenesal

TUNE IN

For clear views of gaming worlds, correct monitor problems before they cause eyestrain.

When's the last time you tuned your monitor? Some time during the early years of Grover Cleveland's administration? Never? And you wonder why your eyeballs glow like hot coals. Stop buying Visene in bulk, and start doing something about the cause of your eye-strain.

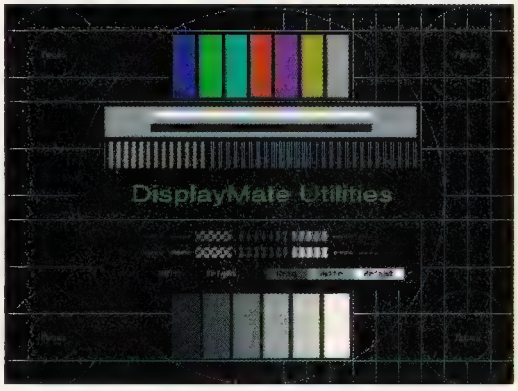
SCREEN TEST

A good place to begin is with a program called **DisplayMate Professional** (Sonera Technologies, P.O. Box 565, Rumson NJ 07760, (908) 747-6886). It's a collection of utilities that deploys more than 200 visual test patterns and 100 diagnostic tests to thoroughly evaluate your monitor and video adapter.

That's *your* monitor and video adapter it'll examine, me bucko, whatever make or model you've got. Bar none. It can examine all lower resolutions displays — MDA, CGA, EGA, MCGA, VGA, Hercules Monochrome — plus all VESA-compatible SVGA modes. Nothing else on the market does that.

Those SuperVGA modes are especially important to the latest gaming software — titles like 360's V for Victory series and EA's Michael Jordan In Flight. Unfortunately, accurate measurement and tuning of these modes is very difficult, due to haphazard SVGA implementation among the various hardware manufacturers.

Display Mate Pro does more than just examine resolutions, of course. It also lets you check screen colors, and object size and location, for starters. You'll be able to adjust for your monitor's peculiarities, and for your current lighting, as well.



DisplayMate Pro's monitor tests and troubleshooting diagnostics will keep your screen in sync, and your eyes well-rested.

You can run DisplayMate Professional from its branching menus, or from the DOS prompt. In the latter case, you have 37 switches that tailor the program's performance, affecting everything from video mode selection to test delays. These customizations can be stored in a Windows INI file, or added as a SET command in your AUTOEXEC.BAT file.

Your INI file is also a good place to try Display Mate Professional's script language. Many commands are self-explanatory, like AUTO_ HELP ON. Others resemble batch file commands; GOTO and WAIT, for instance, let you create some sophisticated subroutines to run under prespecified conditions.

If this file-building sounds too time consuming, try DisplayMate Professional's Keyboard Capture function. It converts keystrokes into commands, and saves them as script files for editing and playback. You can attach these command sequences to any of 40 user-defined function keys. It's a great way to call up any group of tests and print the results with a single keypress.

I tested DisplayMate Professional with a range of monitor/adapter combinations. In each case the program correctly analyzed all available video modes for that particular video adapter and highlighted any results outside the norm. DisplayMate Professional's battery of visual test patterns then brought out more subtle problem areas, like the quick flicker of interlaced displays.

PICTURE PERFECT

I know, the suspense is killing you. Suffice it to say that all the examined units suffered from minor specification misalignments. Admittedly, the problems weren't always immediately noticeable. But they would have contributed significantly to eye strain over time.

DisplayMate's automatic help facility is great, with more than 125 screens. They thoroughly explain the reasons behind each test, and what you should watch for. The accompanying manuals supply a lot of background material, with advice on monitors, safety issues, and maintenance. Technical support is free (though a toll call), detailed, and knowledgeable.

Sure, $249 will buy a lot of games, and may seem like a chunk to spend on software you don't use regularly, but it's all relative. Look at how much your monitor costs. Look at how much glasses and contact lenses will cost in the long run if you don't deal with longterm eye strain.

Do something about it. ❑

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By Dan Muse

DIGITIZED VIDEO

Who asked for it?

To celebrate my first Sports Page column, I decided to buy a new PC — a 486/33 packed with a 300MB hard drive, a CD-ROM drive, and a 15-inch monitor. Like anyone who buys a computer these days, I'd no sooner gotten the machine home than I started to wonder if I had bought enough power. I'm not worried that the setup can't handle any word spreadsheet I throw at it. I *am* concerned that it's not enough to tackle the next round of sports simulations.

It's not really news to anyone that sports games are getting bigger, and that they're making bigger demands on your PC. A quick glance at the requirements on the sports software boxes proves that. But when a game takes up 20 megabytes of precious hard-disk space and makes you wonder whether or not your 386 has the horsepower to drive the action, the results had better be impressive.

We have only ourselves to blame for bloated entertainment software. Games have gotten bigger and more demanding because that's what we asked for. We wanted cool and realistic graphics. We got them. Then we wanted better animation. We got it. Then we had to have sound. We got that, too. But there's more. How about video — short clips of a thunderous dunk or a home run blast? Video is the newest box on the sports-game checklist.

Unlike other advances — graphics, animation, and sound—video isn't something I've made a fuss over. First of all, it turns a big game into monstrous game. Even worse, I've never seen it used in a way that really improves a game. Most video footage is gratuitous — a few seconds here and there to punctuate the action. I didn't ask for that.

It reminds me of when cheese makers starting selling packages with individually wrapped slices. One TV commercial tried to tell me that the company now was selling these single slices because I wanted it. (Somehow I forgot that they had come to the door and asked me, I suppose.) I was content to peel off a piece of cheese and wrap up the rest.

Marketing hype can sometimes convince us that we wanted something that we didn't really ask for. That's how I feel when I see a sports game that touts video footage. Like the cheese wrap, it just gets between me and what I want to do.

Then I talked to Rich Hilleman, vice president of production at EA Sports, Electronics Arts' sports games division, about the upcoming **EA Sports NHL Hockey**. The game seems to have everything a good sports simulation needs: It's endorsed by both the Players' Association and the NHL, so the game gets to use real team logos, and real images and names of NHL players. EA Sports even asked a professional scout from the Winnipeg Jets to rate every NHL player to add realism to the game's artificial intelligence. But as I glanced through the list of features, I noticed that the game needs 15 megabytes of hard-disk space, but only five if you leave out the video.

So my question for Hilleman was, why bother? What does video do? And the guy hit me where I live by describing a video scene of the Boston Bruins' Ray Bourque taking a slap shot. Hilleman's point is that video can put a sports game into a "broader context that draws the player in."

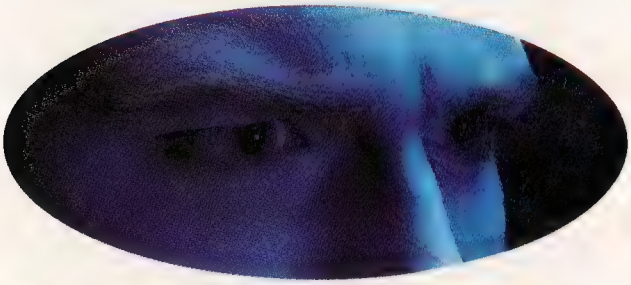
Video does evoke more emotions than a static screen. And, as Hilleman says, technologies such as Video for Windows and better compression will make video more attractive.

I haven't had the chance to play EA Sports NHL Hockey, but I'm anxious to see if it can make video an integral part of the action. I'll let you know. Maybe then I *will* ask for it. ❑

Hey, I asked for great games, but I didn't ask for video. What gives?

Ever Think You Were

SOMETHING ELSE?



SOMEONE ELSE?

SOMEWHERE ELSE?

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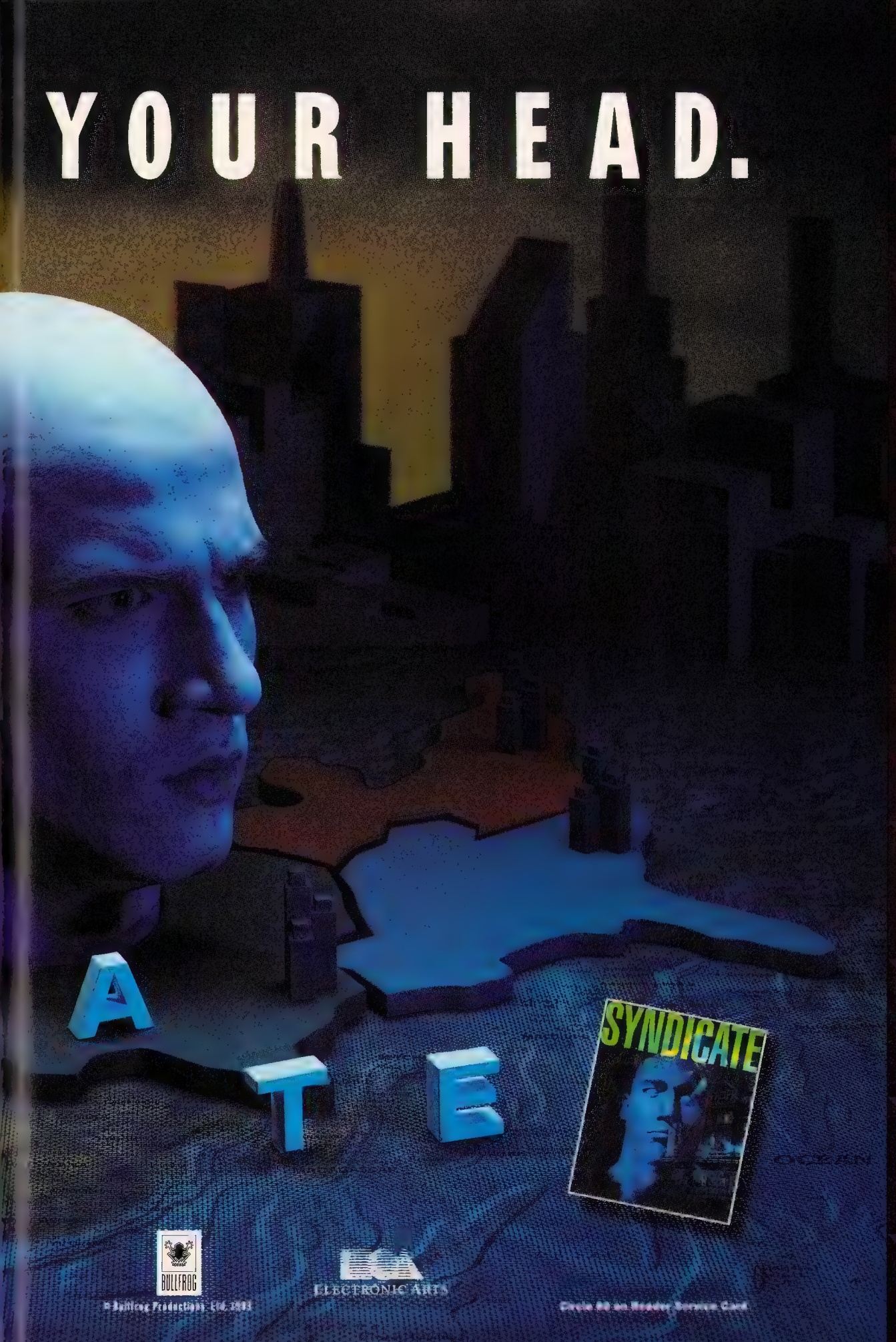

BULLFROG

ELECTRONIC ARTS

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Circle 88 on Reader Service Card.

Continued from page 34.

is rendered in crisp detail, and the scenery out the window is a nicely shaded, 3-D landscape of polygon-filled mountains, valleys, rivers, and shining seas.

The view from the manual is a lot less impressive. It's hard enough figuring out how to fly an advanced aircraft on the PC without being left on your own when you need advice. You may lust after the tips that every rookie pilot gets to help him become a good dogfighter, but don't bother looking in this sim's manual.

Ignore its claim that "Section Three can be consulted for the unique Harrier dogfighting maneuvers made possible by VIFFing." Section Three exists only in the British version of the documentation. We Yanks evidentally get to figure it all out by ourselves. Thanks a lot!

MicroProse sent me the 12 pages cut from Section Three, and they contain information critical to crossing the chasm between frustration and fun. Because the Harrier isn't the fastest jet in the skies, it relies on its unique rotating jet nozzles to give it incredible agility. Called VIFFing (Vectoring In Forward Flight), it's what makes flying the Harrier such an experience. But guess what? All the info about VIFFing is in those dozen pages you don't get to read.

You also don't get to read tips on using the Harrier's weapons, or how to avoid enemy planes and missiles. You'll spend a lot of time performing what flyboys call WAGs, as you stumble across techniques to handle the combat situations you'll encounter in Jump Jet.

WAG? What's that? A Wild-Ass Guess, of course.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

MicroProse; 180 Lakefront Dr., Hunt Valley, MD 21030, (800) 879-7529, (410) 771-1151; IBM PC or compatible (16MHz 286 or faster); 1MB RAM; VGA/MCGA; DOS 5.0 or later; supports AdLib, Roland, SoundBlaster; hard-disk drive required; joystick and mouse recommended; $69.95

MAELSTROM

By Ed Ferrell

To congressional hawks, the Evil Empire may have recently crumbled into a bunch of squabbling republics ruled by a menagerie of former Reds, but as Merit Software sees it, there's an even more malevolent empire in our future. Central to its new science fiction strategy game, Maelstrom, is the Syndicate, a group that makes Stalin's Soviet Union look like a wellspring of democracy.

The Syndicate will stop at nothing short of total domination. You should know — you once were part of of the Syndicate. But then you fell for the peaceful planet Harmony, and it's friendly populous. Since the Harmonics have little talent for war, they elected you Overlord. Lucky you.

NO SMOKING ON THIS PLANET

Harmony is a blast — literally. Composed primarily of Fitzholnium, one of the most explosive elements in the known universe, the planet is on the must-have list of the Syndicate. The only thing that gives you a bit of breathing room is the fact that Fitzholnium is so dangerous that it's commonly believed that a missile launched at the planet would destroy the attacker, too. Needless to say, the Syndicate wants the world in one piece.

You, of course, are bent on keeping the Syndicate's hands off the place. In a simulation reminiscent of SimCity, you must balance the needs of Harmony's population against the ever-pressing need to build up its defenses. Caught in a classic "guns or butter" dilemma, you'll need your wits to keep your electorate happy and the bad guys off your back.

Thank goodness for the Executron 1200. From this holo desk-like control center, you start mining missions and assign research and development projects. From the Government screen you can adjust wages and allocate money for projects; turn to the Military screen to build your armadas and defensive installations.

Incoming messages move across the bottom of the Executron screen like TV storm warnings. All manner of messages arrive from all manner of characters. You'll deal with everyone from Jo Kelle, Queen of Huygen, to Pixor Meunier, military leader of the planet Keyops. Messages are not usually repeated, so even if you've just started reallocating the planet's financial reserves, you're better off answering the "phone" without hesitation. Some characters will carp about their assignment, or beg for more money, while others will have important information that may help you save lives. You have to sort out the frivolous chaff from the substantial wheat in these conversations.

Ignore the Syndicate, and you risk the well-being of the entire alliance. Ignore your subject's needs, and you risk your own well-being. Watch for signs of public dissatisfaction, and keep wages as high as you can. Any way you look at it, you're going to need money, so keep the Fitzholnium mines working.

Crucial to success is appointing appropriate staff to the various projects; a weak team spoils your chances of breakthrough and wastes precious resources. Pure research and development projects may provide the technology needed to increase mining

DISCONNECT
DATE 01-04-97
BOSS, I DON'T KNOW IF YOU'RE AWARE
OF THIS BUT THOSE GUYS IN MILLIWAY
ARE ALL BUYING ZAPHROXIAN LAND
CRUISERS. YOU MIGHT CONSIDER
VIO | GOV | MIL | SIN | RES | MIN | MAIN | SAV | EXIT

In Maelstrom, the Executron 1200 holo deck is your connection to the controls of the planet Harmony.

efficiency, or beef up defenses, but you have to balance their potential against their cost in both funds and time. And you don't have much of the latter.

Defensive measures will pay off in spades, and troops are more affordable than starships. A little of both may be a good plan. If you do decide to post spaceship sentries, or travel to other planets to enlist them in the fight, build your starships early. Once the Syndicate arrives, unfinished starships will be sitting ducks on the planet's surface.

I SPY

Eventually you'll get your chance to zap a few Syndicate invaders. You're still at the controls of the Executron, but you'll take an active role once the lasers start firing. You can take charge and give orders to individual ships or groups of ships. Or, if you'd rather sit back and watch, you can let the Executron handle the battles on your behalf.

Unfortunately, bombs and lasers are only the most visible means of attack. Harmony's explosive nature may make the Syndicate avoid the direct approach, and opt for subversive tactics, instead. When the skies are free from danger, look for it among your staff. Syndicate spies are everywhere.

The Syndicate may infiltrate your team, but with the Secret Intelligence Network — a combination CIA, KGB, and FBI of the future — you can keep Harmony free of moles, and influence nearby planets to join your cause.

With agents well in place, you can sniff out traitors and keep your alliance strong. SIN agents aren't infallible, though, and you'll suffer if your spies are exposed. Agents must make delicate choices, taking simple recon missions, creating full-scale insurgencies, or even using extortion to keep other planets in line.

Maelstrom combines strategy and science fiction into one fun simulation, even in repeated play. A "reshuffling" program makes this non-sequential game a little different each time. Multiple solutions and numerous dead ends are just the start; most characters won't perform exactly the same in any two games.

For a glimpse of the Evil Empire of tomorrow, take a peek at Maelstrom. It's never too early to defend democracy.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Merit Software, 13707 Gamma Rd., Dallas, TX 75244, (214) 385-2353; IBM PC or compatible; 1MB RAM; VGA; DOS 5.0 or later; supports AdLib, SoundBlaster; $69.95

FREDDY PHARKAS, FRONTIER PHARMACIST

By Wayne Kawamoto

They tamed the lawless West. Men, like John Wayne, who had true grit. Men, like Clint Eastwood, who spoke nary a line and chewed cheap cigars.

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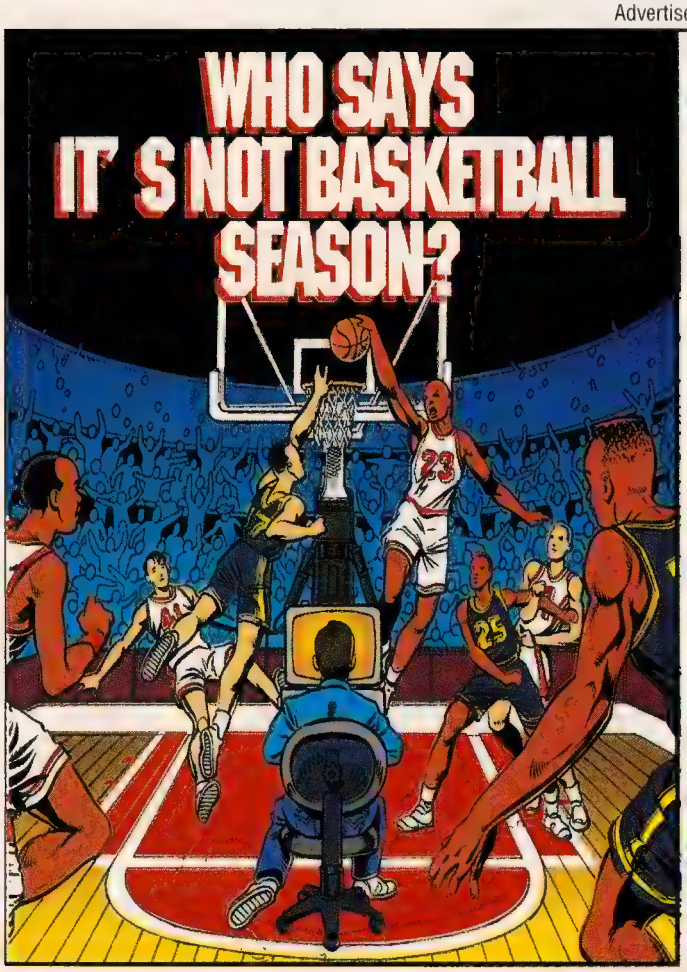

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Circle 81 on Reader Service Card

Men, like Al Lowe, who created Leisure Suit Larry — and his new character, Freddy Pharkas. Say what?

While Hollywood cowboys ride dangerous trails with six-gun in hand and a smirk on their lips, Al brings us the good, the bad, and the frontier pharmaceuticals in Sierra's uproarious new adventure Freddy Pharkas, Frontier Pharmacist.

Like Mel Brooks and his *Blazing Saddles*, Al (How Low Can You Get?) Lowe shows us how the West wasn't won. After you've written four Leisure Suit Larry tales, what's left? Go West, young man.

The hilarious graphic adventure game Freddy Pharkas, Frontier Pharmacist shows how The West wasn't won.

OUTHOUSE HUMOR

Freddy is a former gun slinger, who, after getting his ear shot off in a gunfight, decided to go straight, attend college, and become a mild-mannered pharmacist. As the game's "Ballad of Freddy Pharkas" goes:

After Fred matriculated,
Got his PhD and graduated.
Moved out to Coarsegold
And bought a pharmacy.

(Sing it to a western tune, like the theme from "Rawhide," and you'll get the idea.)

In Pharkas, another in Sierra's series of 3-D interactive adventure games, you walk around, figure out the puzzles in an old Western town, and rid the area of the lawless Lever brothers. (Don't they make soap?) Sierra's time-tested graphic interface lets you easily perform any action using your mouse. Use the eye icon to look around and examine objects, a hand to take or use things, and a talking icon to speak with other characters. This interface has been successfully used in other Sierra games, such as King's Quest VI, Robin Hood, and Laura Bow.

What would John Wayne or Clint Eastwood do if they ran into some of Freddy's situations? Freddy faces the wrong end of a sick horse and passes out. He has to stop a stampeding herd of wayward escargot (yes, snails) that threatens to slime the town. He faces long lines of desperate townspeople in front of the outhouses. Yes, the jokes do manage to get out of the bathroom, and there are a lot of witty gags and one-liners throughout the game.

You'll meet such notables as an Indian sidekick named Srini Lalkaka Bagdnish, Whittlin' Willie, and Madame Ovarees. There's also a certain ancestor of a famous PC character who has an affinity for white polyester. (His initials are LSL.) If you read the tombstones in the cemetery, you'll see RIPs for other PC personalities, like Ernie Fleabeak, Eric D.N. Reddy, and Les Moanly. Read the labels on over-the-counter medicines, and you'll see Oil of Ol' Lady Demoisterizer, Prospector's Pride Uranium Hair Lightener, and Instant Redneck Tanning Fluid.

Not only does Pharkas provide plenty of laughs, but it also serves up some challenging puzzles. Be sure to brush up your chemistry, because throughout the game, you'll prepare prescriptions and mix formulas. In fact, the entire first act consists primarily of mixing prescriptions for your customers (with some cleverly integrated copy protection).

But can a past gunslinger make it as a pharmacist in a Western town? As the ballad says,

His peaceful new survival
Was shot to hell upon arrival.

HAPPY TRAILS, FAMOUS PHARMACIST

There's an evil undercurrent in the town (sort of like a David Lynch movie), and reluctantly our hero takes up gun-slinging again. Here the game offers arcade shooting segments. For those of you who hate these tests of hand-eye coordination, the game lets you essentially bypass them. These challenges are of the arcade shooting gallery type (sort of like Operation Wolf), and at first Freddy has a shaky Don Knotts-style hand.

Freddy Pharkas does an excellent job of capturing the Western theme, then playing with it. It's a throwback to the days when your health and personality depended on the number of bumps on the back of your head, and ailments were cured with leaches. Freddy himself is a melodramatic good guy who's out to do his best, complete with smile and shining teeth.

The game also offers several slick innovations. In the beginning, the street sequences fade from a sepia-tone picture into full color, just like in the movies. The entire town is one huge picture that scrolls, and the illusion of the characters enlarging and shrinking with the changing perspective is better than ever.

Other nice touches include a wind that blows the leaves and branches, and turns windmills and weathervanes. In all, the game has graphics that hold their own against last year's King's Quest VI.

As adventure games go, Freddy Pharkas, Frontier Pharmacist is an entertaining jaunt, flush with good characters, funny situations, and some mind-bending puzzles.It's a solid game throughout.

In the end, you and Freddy will have earned your well-deserved rides into the sunset, singing,

Pharkas, Freddy Pharkas.
Frontier pharmacist bourgeoisie,
Freddy Pharkas, Freddy Pharkas.
Peerless, earless, and free!

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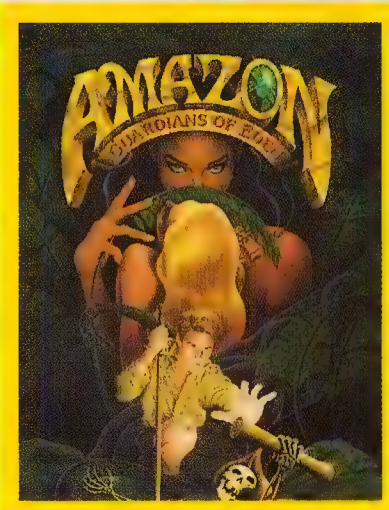

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AUG PCG1

Circle 19 on Reader Service Card

As Roy Rogers used to say , "Happy trails!" With Freddie Pharkus, though, your trails will more likely be goofy.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Sierra On-Line, P.O. Box 800, Coarsegold, CA 93614-0800, (209) 683-8989; IBM PC or compatible (16MHz 286 or faster); 640K RAM; EGA/VGA; supports AdLib, Roland, Microsoft Sound System, ProAudio Spectrum, and SoundBlaster; hard disk drive required; mouse recommended; (Windows version requires a 386SX or faster, Windows 3.1 or later, and 2MB RAM); $69.95

RINGWORLD: REVENGE OF THE PATRIARCH

By Peter Olafson

This game has the ragged edges that betray a first effort. No tidal waves from Sierra-wannabe Tsunami here: There's not even enough of a wave to coast onto shore.

This rather traditional animated adventure, based on Larry Nivens' celebrated 1970 science-fiction novel, casts you as Quinn, a Sean Connery-esque mercenary searching a ribbon-like planet for "stasis" boxes that contain ancient technology. The short version of the story is that bad folks are on your tail and the fate of the human race is at stake. What else is new?

Joining you in your search are a bat-eared tiger Kzin (evidently a relative of Wing Commander's tiger-like Kilrathi) and Miranda, who looks a bit like Erin Gray (Gil Gerard's sidekick in the Buck Rogers TV show).

IT'S A STIFF

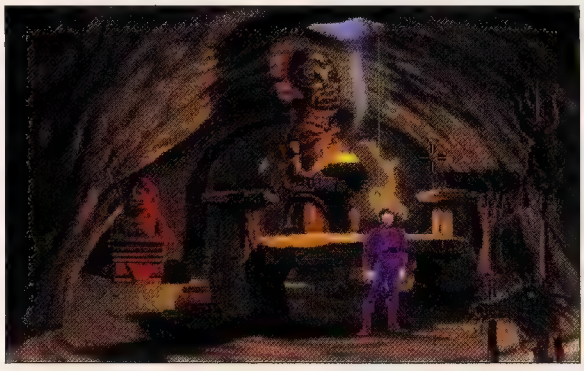
Alas, it's not far into the game that you realize things are amiss.

First off, there's a general stiffness to the character movement and screen scrolling — even on a fast 33MHz 486. Quinn walks as though he's wearing a girdle, and when the chief's daughter moves toward him in the first segment, you can't tell if she's going to embrace him or throttle him.

This stiffness extends into the storytelling: Each segment mechanically follows the one before it, without branches in the plot or really any choice in where to go or what to do next. In Sierra's games, as object-oriented as they may be, there's almost always the option to explore at will. Here, you can explore only the present region (or your three-level ship). Odder still, that region is typically quite small, which is surprising, considering Ringworld is supposed to be untellably vast, with three million times the surface area of Earth.

Ringworld misses an even bigger chance when it omits cooperation between the three members of the party. In fact, you control only Quinn. At the Canyon People's settlement, your Kzin friend goes off to dispatch a creature that's plaguing the community, then reappears later with the dead creature in his arms. Why place a potentially interesting adventure off-screen? How much better this game would have been had it let you switch characters.

And the news gets worse. Ringworld's puzzles are relatively simple and sparse. For example, Quinn makes it into the flesheaters' throne room and simply picks up the stasis box without anyone around to say "boo." Some, though, are unduly difficult, because necessary objects have been exquisitely camouflaged; you'll have to get very touchy-feely with the mouse pointer to sort them from their backgrounds. At least the graphics are serviceable in most cases, with an attractively ragged look to some of the outdoor scenes.



Ringworld's movement — even on a fast PC — is stiff. Unfortunately, that's just the beginning of its problems.

WHAT WENT WRONG, PART TWO

All these complaints might have been forgiven had less of the game been devoted to automated sequences free of player interaction. These lend only to a sensation of following the dead hand of the designers. This isn't game-playing; it's electronic storytelling.

Even the "options" that follow these segments aren't options at all, as they all share (or seem to share) the same outcome. Once the stasis box is retrieved from the flesheaters' cavern, for instance, you can either opt to search the computer records for useful information on how to open it, or check out the stasis box directly. If you pick the latter, you'll be sent off to do the former.

Even the storytelling is sloppy. Presumably, the *Ringworld* book, which is included in the package, isn't a prerequisite for playing Ringworld the game, but a good deal of Ringworld-specific info — names, places, people — is thrust at you early on, and will almost certainly be lost on most players. It's redeemed, in part, by having an online encyclopedia on your ship. However, this method (shared with Megatraveller II) disrupts the unfolding plot. It's like being handed a foreign-language dictionary; you learn the vocabulary, but that doesn't mean you can speak the language.

And what's this 3-D arcade game doing here? Mercifully, there's only one, and it can either be repeated until you get it right or skipped entirely. (My advice? Skip it.)

There's even a bug or two. Problems with erratic mouse performance and inability to save games after a certain point seemed to disappear once I created a Ringworld boot disk. But

in the hunt for a fourth stasis box, my character walked into the sea, the screen went dark, never to light up again, and that was the end of the game. (Tsunami does have an upgraded version of Disk One that may address this and other problems.)

There's some promise here. The interface, for example, encloses all its icons in a tidy triangle that pops up at the press of the right mouse button, and the game's commands are appealingly simple — look, walk, touch, talk, use — with the usual disk and sound options. Ringworld also sports some nice special effects, like the lander moving into the foreground, or the scrolling effect on a remote TV screen as the Kzin explores a cave. And it is nice to see a serious science-fiction adventure — one concerned with science fiction itself.

Keep Ringworld — the book. Read it and enjoy. The game? Chuck it.

1 2 3 **4** 5 6 7 8 9 10

Tsunami Media, Inc., P.O. Box 790, Coarsegold, CA 93614, (209) 683-8266; IBM PC or compatible (16MHz 386 or faster); 640K RAM; VGA; DOS 5.0 or later; VGA; hard-disk drive with at least 10MB free; mouse required; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, Roland, SoundBlaster; $59.95

ALONE IN THE DARK

By Bob Lindstrom

Alone in the Dark will give you a peek at the future of interactive entertainment. This creepy 3-D haunted house game is a thrilling, ground-breaking leap forward in computer games, and a real innovation in action/adventure gaming.

REAL TERROR

You play a male or female investigator (your choice) driven to ferret out the subterranean secrets of a spirit-infested mansion. Hoary premise aside, the big news is that I•Motion uses an innovative combination of three-dimensional polygon-based graphics (similar to the technology

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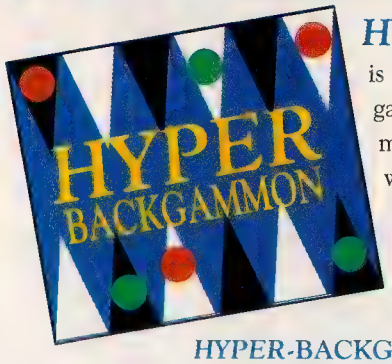

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used in flight simulators) and conventional bit-mapped computer illustrations to create the most believable fantasy milieu ever seen in a computer game. And we're not just talking about interior decoration — even your character is constructed of 3-D polygons and strolls about with surprisingly lifelike, fluid movement.

Alone in the Dark is one of the must-play games of the year.

Enhancing the visuals is the game's display, which uses the full width and height of the monitor's screen to show your view of the surroundings — no cut-down windows or partial screen displays here. When you're alone in the dark of Derceto, there's no interface to get between you and terror. With occasional moans, howls, and a brooding musical score piercing the silence, exploring this dimensional domain of spirits is a totally engrossing experience.

As you wander from hall to horror, the camera-style angle showing your point of view changes to provide what the computer perceives to be the best perspective on your character and environment. This isn't always the best, however. Sometimes the computer places you in the cheap seats behind a pillar or post, making it difficult to accomplish a simple task.

Mechanically, Alone in the Dark draws on many of the conventions of computer adventuring: Find the object, go to the right location, use the object. The puzzles are challenging, sometimes brutally tough, with an occasional real-time spin put on them as a monster gets on your tail and tries to keep you from completing a solution. If you're not fast enough, you'll die in a few moments of blood-splattered violence. That violence, by the way, sums up character interaction in the game. When you encounter another creature, you can pretty much count on a kill-or-be-killed relationship, nothing more.

On the up side, you can save the game before disaster strikes. (On the down side, I was unable to access more than one saved game, despite information in the manual that suggests several save games can be stockpiled and restored.)

GETTING DIZZY

Learning to control your character is a tad troublesome at first. Since movement is limited to forward/backward motion and left/right rotation, you have to navigate a course through the house while keeping the character's orientation in mind. And because the camera angle regularly changes as you traipse through a location, figuring out which cursor key to press can be a dizzying experience until you adjust to the game controls.

For some players, finessing the keyboard will be a moot point. They'll be disappointed because Alone in the Dark has no available joystick control. It's keyboard only. A joystick would make movement more accessible and a two-button joystick would eliminate some of the slightly awkward multi-key combinations needed to control the character.

To select from a range of character actions, you'll have to leave the full-screen action and shift to an inventory/action screen to toggle between fight, drop, search, throw, and a few other activities. Real time stands still while you're readying your next move in this screen, so you're not going to get ambushed by a monster while you're off in computer-interface-land. You'll scroll swiftly through a list of objects in your possession and rapidly choose a move. Still, shifting away from the main action crumbles your suspension of disbelief in a game that has an unusually powerful habit of luring you into the fantasy. A few hot keys or some other device that would keep you in the house while making choices could be better.

And, like all 3-D graphics games, the more powerful your computer, the better the experience. A 386/33 is perfect.

Players comfortable with more conventional graphic adventures will be swept away by the excitement of this game. With a high sense of drama and atmosphere, state-of-the-art 3-D graphics technology, and some real knuckle-gnawing puzzlers, Alone in the Dark is one of the must-play games of the year.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

I•Motion, 1333 Ocean Ave., Santa Monica, CA 90401, (310) 576-1885; IBM PC or compatible (386 or faster recommended); 640K RAM; VGA (256-color); DOS 3.1 or later; $59.95

SPACE QUEST V: THE NEXT MUTATION

By Wes Nihei

In space, no one can hear you laugh.

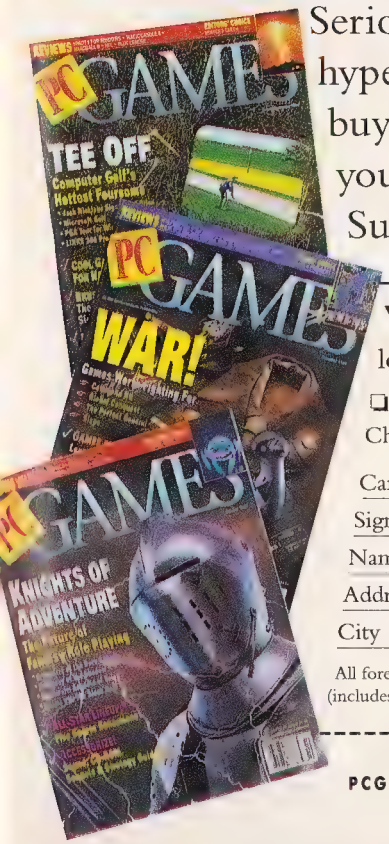
Sierra created Space Quest just for laughs, but it succeeded in building a top-notch series of adventure games. Space Quest V: The Next Mutation continues the tradition, and keeps 'em rolling in the asteroids.

Once again, you step into the soiled shoes of Roger Wilco, the galaxy's most inept janitor. This time Roger's bamboozled his way through StarCon Space Academy, and, unbelievably, now commands his own starship, the Eureka. It's only a ratty garbage scow — with a warp drive and a cloaking device — but, hey, a command is a command.

The story also picks up a piece of plot from Space Quest IV, as Rog finally meets the mystery woman from

Paul McGuire

TRUTH OR DAIRY



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the Holodisk. She turns out to be an ambassador who wants the Star Confederacy to capture the Sludge Bandits, nasty boys who dump toxic waste on the four planets in her star system. Unfortunately, Roger's not the only one pursuing this garbage-minded dream; so is Captain Quirk, commander of StarCon's flagship.

Your work's cut out for you here. You must outwit Quirk, win the lady's hand, escape an android assassin, battle gigantic robotic creatures, and capture a gang of half-wit mutants. You also have to take out the garbage.

LOST IN SPACE QUEST

Space Quest is a good-looking graphic adventure game that keeps you entertained with a far-flung space trek and plenty of yuks. Your quest begins in the hallowed halls of StarCon Academy, rockets through various vehicles in deep space, and lands on several far-out worlds. As in previous Wilco adventures, you must explore your surroundings, converse with other characters, and find various objects to guide Roger through a variety of misadventures.

Humor runs the gamut from slapstick to sight gags. The laughs and chuckles, most of them the slip-on-a-banana-peel kind, are almost all at Roger's expense. He's the butt — deservedly so — of every character's jokes. Science fiction buffs particularly will enjoy the countless references to films and games of the genre (the Bridge Simulator Room resembles the Millennium Falcon from *Star Wars*, the guards play Asteroids on their security monitors, and Roger suffers from a face-hugging alien companion).

Typically Space Quest-ish, this fifth episode is full of perplexing puzzles as well as deadly alien encounters. You pilot your ship, the Eureka, through various space hazards, though half the challenge is just figuring out how to run things. Space Quest V taxes your brain more than your reflexes, and if you're easily exasperated, skip this one. Space Quest vets, though, should find it easier — about as much a challenge as IV.

Success comes from using well-worn adventure game strategy: explore everywhere and touch everything. You find key items hidden in out-of-the-way places, and even the most mundane objects may have a special purpose. Antacid, a hole punch, and a fuse, among dozens of other bits, play critical roles, for instance.

Fail, and you die. Simple. Except that you'll have to put up with a put-down by the program.

GARBAGE IN, YUKS OUT

At least the game is easy to play. The simple point-and-click interface, where the mouse really rules, will be familiar to Sierra adventure game players. To optimize the program's performance on your PC, you can adjust the graphic detail, volume, and game speed from a single control panel.

A easy-to-use menu bar displays the icons that make Roger walk and talk, look and grab. A special command lets you direct orders specifically to your sometimes restless crew. Space Quest V even hides the menu until you point at it, freeing up more room for the game's first-rate graphics.

That's important, for the program's 256-color VGA images are superb. All the hardware, including space vehicles and weapons, sport sleek, high-tech designs, while the motley cast of weird characters showcase some imaginative fantasy art. Equally impressive are the lush scenery and the detailed background graphics.

Great art, and some good grins, are part of Space Quest V's vision of outer space.

Space Quest V is a well-designed, entertaining graphic adventure game that's funny and fun. Roger Wilco fans will definitely find their hero in good form, but should be ready for some serious problem solving.

We all know the final frontier comes charged with action. We've watched enough *Star Trek* for that. But it's nice to know humor isn't lost in space.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

Sierra, P.O. Box 600, Coarsegold, CA 93614-0600, (800) 326-6654; IBM PC or compatible (286 or faster); 640K RAM; EGA/VGA/Tandy VGA; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, Roland MT-32, SoundBlaster, Thunderboard; hard-disk drive required; mouse recommended; $59.45

SHERLOCK HOLMES CONSULTING DETECTIVE: VOLUME II

By Bob Lindstrom

The game is afoot...all over again.

For the second time, Sherlock Holmes is sleuthing the upper crust and grilling the low lifes of London in a multimedia quest for truth, justice, and the solution to three insidious crimes.

As its name suggests the CD-ROM-based Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective: Volume II is the follow-up to ICOM Simulations' immensely successful Holmes mystery,which pioneered the use of live-action video in a multimedia game. No longer did the computer reduce the legendary Holmes to mere text or a Saturday morning caricature of the lanky, caped detective. Holmes moved and spoke and deduced in full-motion, color video clips. Somehow, the bat-

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The pace never falters in *Shadowcaster*, the unique new point-of-view action adventure from ORIGIN. You race through corridors lined with pulsing lights, and into chambers covered with sculpted faces in this smooth-scrolling, fun-filled odyssey.

You discover magic, but you won't need to mix reagents or memorize spells. You weave your way through dungeons, caverns, castles and caves, but you won't have time to linger – the powerful and wicked lurk at every turn, just waiting for the chance to draw first blood. In the final battle, you challenge a being with powers that match (or surpass!) your own — and the irresistable force meets the immovable object.

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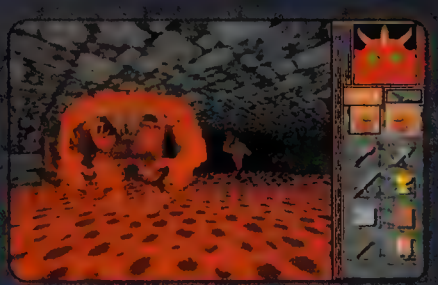

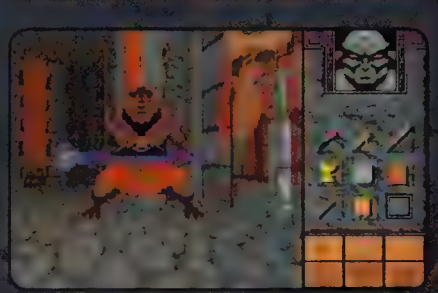

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tered term "interactive movie" seemed a bit less abused when that trio of mysteries unfolded in a clever combination of illustration, text, and video.

Unfortunately, like all mysteries, once they were solved — to state the obvious — the mystery was over. Now, Volume II of the series (a third volume is also available) exercises our logical "chops" with three more befuddling capers: The Two Lions, The Pilfered Paintings, and The Murdered Munitions Magnate.

MORE OF THE SAME GOOD STUFF

If you enjoyed the first CD, you'll probably take to the sequel, because, to be honest, this volume is more of the same. Enhancements are few, with the much-improved color of the video clips the most evident. The images are now vibrant, lacking the slightly faded quality of the original. When you're ready to test your reasoning in the courtroom, the judge who grills you on the details of your solution in Consulting Detective: Volume II is a digitized-video actor, not an illustration.

And, of course, you get 90 new minutes of interactive video to pull you into the dastardly activities. The acting performances are effective and often quite amusing. To ICOM's credit, the production values, though not lavish, are slick and professional, about on a par with daytime television.

Overall, the goals and game interface have changed little. As in the first volume, your task is to take careful notes of which people and places are mentioned, then research them all until you've gathered enough facts to go to court.

Each mystery begins with a video clip setting forth the crime that will propel Holmes, Watson, and you into action. Once again, the point-and-click interface puts you in charge of the case. You'll add contacts to your personal notebook; browse a directory of people and places for clue sources; and gather tips and hints in the *London Times*, reading either the electronic version contained within the game or the small printed versions included in the package.

With your suspicions and facts in order, you'll click more icons to visit people and locations throughout London; research Holmes' extensive files for impressively large or discouragingly small amounts of information; and dispatch the scurrilous (but effective) Baker Street Irregulars to gather facts for you in their stealthy ways.

The video clips come into play when you go on location to interview a suspect. If you're on the trail of a solution, a video window appears and displays a brief scene containing disclosures that should put you closer to a solution. If you miss something, a VCR-like interface beneath the video image lets you replay the video, or do a visible fast scan forward or backward through the scene, a feature that's new in Volume II. During fast scan, tiny fragments of the digitized audio dialogue play to further help you zero in on the segment you want to review.

If you've chosen your suspect or location poorly, however, you'll usually see a sepia-tinted illustration of someone's front door, then hear Holmes' or Watson's digitized voice-over complain about what a waste of time this trip turned out to be.

When you have a solution you'll go to court, where you'll either confront the video judge and answer questions on who did what to whom, or be told that you haven't gathered enough clues to enter the solution part of the game. Herein lies a design flaw.

Frequently, because you haven't gathered enough clues, you'll know motive and method before the judge will allow you to try the case. That's frustrating. On the flip side, you can check in with the judge frequently until he tells you the case is complete, then guess your way through the solution. That's cheating. At times like these, drama goes out the window and you realize you're just wandering through an elaborate multimedia database. Sure, the game scores your progress on the basis of how efficiently you gather clues, but who cares? The bottom line is solving the mystery.

FOUR HOURS OF FUN

The game's writing quality is good, consistent with the period and the characters, although the mysteries tend to be somewhat linear with few red-herrings and fewer surprises. I solved each puzzle in about an hour, more or less. If you measure game value by the time consumed, three or four hours of entertainment represents a sparse value. I take a different view. I'd rather have three hours of rich diversion like this than 100 hours of roaming a tile-based landscape in search of gold and monsters. Still, because ICOM has so obviously mastered the technology and the structure of these interactive mysteries, perhaps Volume III will turn the tables, pull a few more plot twists, and rigorously challenge your sleuthing skills.

Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective is an outstanding game that offers a satisfying, quality entertainment experience. Volume II is another seminal achievement in multimedia entertainment. It's a little disappointing that it's so similar to the original, but it offers the same high level of challenge

Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective: Volume II may be more of the same, but it's more of the same intriguing multimedia mysteries.

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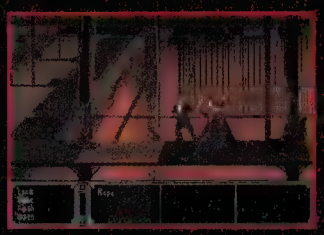

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and entertainment. I'm looking forward to the next trip to London in Volume III.

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

ICOM Simulations, 648 South Wheeling Rd., Wheeling, IL 60090, (708) 520-4440; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; VGA; DOS 3.3 or later; supports ProAudio Spectrum and SoundBlaster; requires CD-ROM drive (150Kb transfer rate and 380ms access time or faster); mouse required; $69.95

ULTRABOTS

By Jim Bail

When it comes to science fiction, the future usually isn't pretty. Aliens drip gunk from slathering jaws, comets smash the Earth into a billion bits, and robots rule the world. Take comfort that it's only make-believe.

Ultrabots, the new simulation cum action game from Electronic Arts, may have a pretty face, but its story is just as ugly as all those science fiction nightmares. A century from now, a huge UFO breaches the outer reaches of the solar system. Citizens of Earth, Luna, and Mars debate its origin and ponder its mission as they monitor the object's flight and detect it scanning the planets it passes. Attempts to communicate with it are fruitless.

As the ship finally parks in orbit, it delivers hundreds of immense, mindless robots to the Earth's surface. They promptly put all debate to rest as they begin a systematic killing spree. Only when all other options are exhausted does humanity, in desperation, reconstruct and launch its mothballed nuclear weapons in a final attempt to stop the invaders. After a successful attack on the alien bases that power the robots, the threat's eliminated, but the world is left in ruins.

As Earth prepares for a second visit from the aliens, the survivors feverishly retrofit the lifeless robots for human operation. When the aliens return, they'll be greeted by mankind's own 'bots. The battle for survival begins as you take command — on relatively even terms.

CRIPPLE THE NET

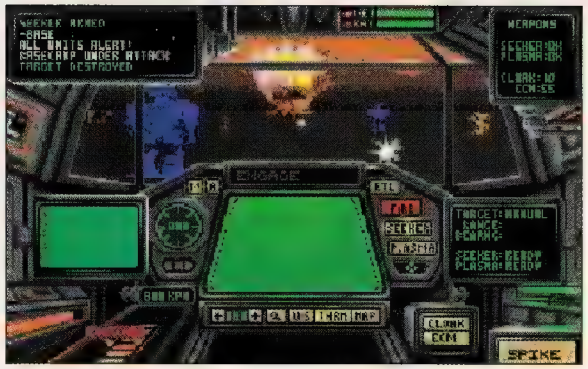
Action takes place on two levels; the strategic level puts you in command of Earth's robot army as you match wits with a very capable computer opponent. The tactical level challenges you to master player-controlled robot-to-robot combat with three distinctly different types of units: well-armed Humanoids, fast Scouts, and slow-moving Net Builders.

There's more to this futuristic warfare than blowing away anything in your sights. All of the robots are dependent upon the "net," a grid of power and communications relays. Units outside the net must use their limited battery power to defend themselves until they can return to the power grid. The key to Ultrabot success is to cripple the enemy net by destroying his relays — which renders enemy 'bots ineffective — before striking at his base.

You must use the unique strengths of your units to chip away at the enemy net. It's a tricky task, since an attack on a net almost immediately draws a response. Your best chance for sucess is to dispatch net builders to pave the way for your advance, then deploy a humanoid to carry out the attack as a scout watches for the enemy. Tactics play an important part, too, for when you're outgunned, you can hit hard, then retreat as soon as the enemy's detected. Damaged units can be repaired once they are safely back in your base, but with already limited resources, you're better off keeping damage to a minimum.

FIRE WHEN READY

The post-nuclear world is not a pretty place, so don't look for dazzling scenery outside your window. Inside your Ultrabot cockpit, though, it's a different story. An Ultrabot is really just a complex system of individual subsystems, each responsible for a part of the robot, such as movement, communications, or attack. Although automation relieves you of much of the work, each subsystem requires some input from you. With such technology as radar, thermal night sighting, on-board cameras, and an array of offensive and defensive weapons at your disposal, you'll appreciate the well-done graphics of the console and its easy-to-use operation. You can use a joystick, but the subsystems respond well to the mouse.



The cockpit of an Ultrabot is a complex place, filled with weapons systems and sophisticated electronics.

Ultrabots runs well even on a less-capable PC, like a 16MHz 386. DOS 5 comes recommended, for you'll need to tweak as much memory as possible (610K) out of your machine.

You don't have to be a science fiction fan to have fun with this game, but it doesn't hurt to have a military (or at least chess-like) outlook while doing battle. It's not just a "see 'em, cream 'em" kind of game; ask questions first, shoot second.

Here's to winning the war, and making the world a safe place.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

Electronic Arts, P.O. Box 7578, San Mateo, CA 94403, (415) 571-7171; IBM PC or compatible (16MHz 386 or faster); 640K RAM; VGA; DOS 3.3 or later (DOS 5.0 or later recommended); supports AdLib, Roland, SoundBlaster; $59.95

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LEMMINGS 2: THE TRIBES

By Brad Dixon

It doesn't happen often. Usually sequels are but imitations of the originals. Forgettable films and high-concept books like *Scarlet* and *Rocky III*?) pale in comparison to their predecessors.

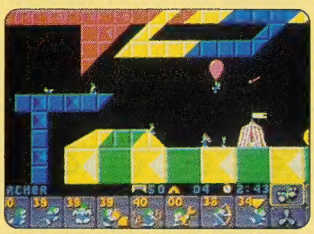
That's true of computer games, too, usually...but not always. Case in point: **Lemmings 2: The Tribes.** Psygnosis' new twist on the phenomenally successful Lemmings. may in fact overshadow its predecessor. Based on the further adventures of those curious lemmings, this title takes the incredibly addictive fun of the original and multiplies it by 12.

Save Those Lemmings

The only thing that's stayed the same in this second Lemmings is your job — getting the lemmings safely from level to level. Almost everything else has changed. The mop-topped lemmings find their beloved Island threatened by an evil darkness. As the story goes, each of the 12 lemming tribes inherited a piece of a broken Golden Talisman that, when rejoined, will let the lemmings leave their island prison. Each tribe has taken up residence on a different part of the island. There's a Circus Tribe, a Medieval Tribe, a Space Tribe, a Beach Tribe and more, all with attributes developed for surviving in its own part of the island.

The variety of this game comes at a price. To play Lemmings 2 at its best, you'll need more than four megs of hard-disk space and two megs of RAM. To hear its excellent sound track, you'll need an audio card.

From the main menu, you can pick a Practice Tribe to familiarize yourself with the new Lemmings characters. That's a good idea, since Lemmings 2 includes dozens of new characters. Unlike the original, which limited you to a few characters, including diggers, walkers, and blockers, Lemmings 2 features 60 characters, each with a unique skill. From the Surfer and Parachuter to the Pole Vaulter and Skier, each character has personality. It's easy to spend hours practicing with the new creatures.



You've got to save each tribe from its suicidal tendencies. Here, the Circus Tribe escapes by balloon.

When you're ready to begin, choose the Map option from the main menu. A map of Lemming Island appears with the 12 tribes' areas clearly identified. Move the cursor over the tribe you want to rescue first and double-click. Another double-click initiates the adventure.

You must lead each tribe through a maze to the safe exit hidden somewhere on each level. Take advantage of the Stomper Lemming to break through tunnel floors, or use the Flame Thrower Lemming to blast through walls and obstacles. You get all the lemmings necessary to get the tribe to the next level. You have to move fast and keep as many lemmings alive as possible.

If you can get the tribe to the next level without losing a single Lemming, you'll earn a golden piece of the Talisman. Lose a few lemmings, and you're rewarded with a silver Talisman; kill off a few more and you get the bronze. Think of it as a Lemmings form of Olympics.

Each tribe must survive ten levels in their part of Lemming Island to be saved. Only when you earn the Gold Talisman for every level of each tribe can the tiny beings leave the island. Naturally, that takes a long time, so use the game's save and load feature to maximize your chances of winning. (You can also replay any completed level in an attempt to improve your prize from silver or bronze to gold.)

You Can't Top This

Sometimes just getting to the end of a computer game is reward enough. But in Lemmings 2: The Tribes, the playing's the thing. Every turn on every level for every tribe provides a new challenge and puzzle. It's just you against the maze — with a few dozen helpful lemmings — as you hunt for the exit.

Hot new technology? Probably not. Great game for anyone old enough to figure out the plot? Definitely! Lemmings 2: The Tribes is a game you can play for hours, days, weeks — or in fragments of time here and there when you need a break. I only have one question: How are they going to top this? ❑

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 **9** 10

Psygnosis Ltd., 675 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139, (617) 497-7794; IBM PC or compatible, 286 or faster, 2MB RAM; VGA/MCGA; supports AdLib, AdLib Gold, Roland, SoundBlaster, SoundBlaster Pro; $59.99.

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